

2019 OFBF Water Quality Status Report

Six years ago, Ohio Farm Bureau announced it was investing \$1 million of member funds to develop a comprehensive Water Quality Action Plan.

The goal was to help farmers do their part to clean up and preserve the state's waterways.

So far, Ohio Farm Bureau has committed \$2.63 million to this effort. This water quality report is the sixth in a series Ohio Farm Bureau has produced to show the strides farmers have made in improving and protecting one of the state's most valuable resources and that clean water and productive farming can coexist.

H2Ohio: A giant step forward

H2Ohio is the state of Ohio's ambitious plan to invest \$172 million in everything from improving home septic systems to incentivizing farmers to implement conservation practices.

Ohio Farm Bureau played a leadership role in laying the groundwork for Gov. Mike DeWine's H2Ohio program. In 2014, OFBF created a coalition called Healthy Water Ohio. The group gathered information from more than 200 individuals and organizations with diversified interests to create a long-term water strategy. H2Ohio closely resembles the water



trust concept documented in Healthy Water Ohio.

H2Ohio funds were initially targeted to 14 counties in the Maumee River Watershed in northwest Ohio. Farmers there have overwhelmingly embraced the program. In early 2020, more than 2,500 attended meetings that explained the program, and more than 2,000 farmers enrolled more than 1 million acres in conservation practices. That response prompted

DeWine to set aside \$50 million for H2Ohio despite the budgetary challenges caused by COVID-19.

Best practices to reduce phosphorus runoff:

1. Soil testing
2. Variable-rate fertilization
3. Subservice nutrient application
4. Manure incorporation
5. Conservation crop rotation
6. Cover crop
7. Drainage water management
8. Two-stage ditch construction
9. Edge-of-field buffers
10. Wetlands



2,000

the number of submitted applications by farmers to participate in H2Ohio to manage nutrients by using several identified best practices.

1.1 million

the collective acreage contained in those applications.

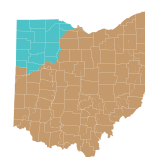
\$172 million



how much money the Ohio Legislature allotted last summer toward H2Ohio.

14

the number of Ohio counties, all within the Maumee River Watershed, that are eligible to participate in the initial phase of the program: Allen, Auglaize, Defiance, Fulton, Hancock, Hardin, Henry, Lucas, Mercer, Paulding, Putnam, Van Wert, Williams and Wood.



10

identified most effective and cost-efficient agricultural management practices to reduce phosphorus runoff.



Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative

Another significant accomplishment from 2019 was the creation of the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative.

OACI is a diverse group of 18 stakeholders representing agriculture, conservation, environmental groups and research institutions. Last year,



OACI launched a new, voluntary farmer certification program to help increase adoption of best manage-

ment practices for water quality and recognize farmers who demonstrate continuous commitment to improvement. Going forward, OACI will work to promote H2Ohio programs, develop benchmarks for best practices and create a framework for voluntary certification.



The creation of the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative forged together groups that previously did not always see water quality solutions the same way. Ohio's water quality changed that thinking. Here are perspectives from representatives of two non-agriculture organizations about the evolution.

Peter Bucher, managing director of water policy, Ohio Environmental Council, talks about the structure and alliance of OACI member organizations.

Q: What motivated your organization to join OACI?

BUCHER: The OEC has worked with environmental partners for years to secure significant water quality improvements in Lake Erie and other Ohio waterways. Following the Toledo water crisis in 2014, when a harmful algal bloom shut down Toledo's drinking water supply, we knew that more needed to be done in partnership with the agricultural industry to prevent future blooms and secure clean water for all while also ensuring Ohio's agricultural sector succeeds. Together, we can achieve these goals and the OACI provides the platform to do so.

Q: Describe the value OACI is providing Ohio and the nation.

BUCHER: I think through the work we've done so far, we've shown that when people from different places and perspectives come together to address difficult problems, we can successfully work together. I also think OACI's work to date has demonstrated that you can have a strong farm economy and healthy waterways at the same time.

Q: Describe something you weren't expecting in this type of partnership.

BUCHER: I've been impressed at how well people have accepted those they didn't know well just two years ago. OACI members came to this process with an open mind and a willingness to work through tough questions. We're seeing strong interest in our programming as a result of those conversations.

Jessica D'Ambrosio, The Nature Conservancy, Ohio agriculture director

Q: What motivated your organization to join OACI?

D'AMBROSIO: The Nature Conservancy has been working with agriculture partners for more than 20 years in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana. We developed especially strong partnerships in the Western Lake Erie Basin that helped create the 4R certification program and we conducted a lot of education and outreach about water quality over the past 10 years. We can't reach our conservation goals without support and collaboration with agriculture. When we were approached to be part of OACI, there was no hesitation to join, and we felt honored that the ag community respected us and trusted us enough to be part of it.

Q: Describe the value OACI is providing Ohio and the nation.

D'AMBROSIO: The value of relationships and what can be accomplished when you choose to set your differences aside and choose to find a set of goals to agree on.

Q: Describe something that you weren't expecting in this type of partnership.

D'AMBROSIO: There were a few new partners at the table when OACI was formed on both the ag and environmental side. Trust wasn't there yet. I was impressed with their willingness to make it work even though it was uncomfortable. I was impressed with their ability to bring authentic communication to the table and listen to all sides. From The Conservancy perspective, I was impressed with the agriculture groups pushing each other to come to agreement between themselves and as well as gaining agreement with the environmental groups.



Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network

Launched in 2015, the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network continues to provide a venue for showcasing on-farm water quality conservation practices.

Through a partnership between Ohio Farm Bureau and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the three demonstration farms partners are Bill and Shane Kellogg of Kellogg Farms in Hardin County; Stateler Family Farms in Hancock County owned and operated by Duane and Anthony Stateler; and Kurt Farms in Hardin County owned and operated by Chris Kurt.

The family farms have continually opened up their fields to groups so farmers from around the state could view the experiments occurring at these living labs. Since the start of the project, 2,000 people have made the trek.

Last year a major goal of the project was outreach to fellow farmers who had not had the chance to visit the farms. This was accomplished in two ways. First, a mid-project overview booklet was created that outlined the current practices taking place on the farms including cover

crops, drainage water management structures, manure and fertilizer placement, phosphorus removal beds and many others. These practices were categorized for farmers so they could understand what conservation goal was being met including following the 4Rs (Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time, Right Place), reducing soil erosion and developing a water management plan. The booklet also provided information on the economics of each practice and the latest research available and it was widely distributed throughout the state. County Farm Bureau offices have copies of the report for further distribution. The second project was a video series to further share information. The videos were developed into chapters for ease of use in classrooms and for others who were interested to learn more about the project but who cannot easily travel to the farms.

Blanchard River
DEMONSTRATION
FARMS NETWORK

*Watch the video series
at blancharddemofarms.org*



KELLOGG FARMS



STATELER FAMILY FARMS



KURT FARMS

4Rs



RIGHT SOURCE



RIGHT RATE



RIGHT TIME



RIGHT PLACE



Phosphorous: friend or foe

- Essential to producing food, fiber and fuel
- Dissolved phosphorus gets into waterways and contributes to the growth of harmful algal blooms. It is found in manure, commercial fertilizer and municipal wastewater.
- Prior to 1972, phosphorus loads in Lake Erie came primarily through point-source pollution such as factories.
- The USDA estimates that 99% of cropland acres in the Western Lake Erie Basin are managed with at least one conservation practice.

County Water Quality Grants

Over the past five years, Ohio Farm Bureau and partnering organizations have invested more than \$1.1 million in county Farm Bureau-led water quality projects. In all, Ohio Farm Bureau has awarded nearly \$450,000 to county Farm Bureaus which in turn garnered nearly \$700,000 in matching funds from outside groups that include businesses, universities, Soil and

Water Conservation Districts, federal agencies and local park districts. Forty-seven county Farm Bureaus have partnered with over 150 groups on 59 programs. Many county Farm Bureaus partnered with their local Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

2019 Project Highlights: *County Farm Bureaus receiving funding and their projects*

- **Ashland County:** Implemented Adapt-N and Field Forecasting Tool crop modeling systems to improve nutrient efficiency and reduce nutrient loss.
- **Athens and Meigs Counties:** The County Farm Bureaus and SWCDs purchased a no-till drill and offered it to area farmers to help reduce soil loss and nutrient runoff.
- **Butler County:** Butler SWCD organized a county water quality and conservation educational event featuring a tour of the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network.
- **Clark County:** Sponsored an educational event featuring a tour of the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network.
- **Clinton and Fayette Counties:** Sponsored OFBF's AgriPOWER leadership institute class visit to OSU's Stone Lab on Lake Erie to learn about agriculture and water quality issues.
- **Cuyahoga County:** Supported a two-day middle and high school science teacher workshop to explore soil and water.
- **Fairfield and Hocking Counties:** Collaborated with local SWCD and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to visit the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network.
- **Knox County:** Updated the ONMRK app that helps farmers comply with state and federal water quality laws.
- **Preble County:** Partnered with SWCD and OSU Extension to conduct a workshop for rural septic installation.
- **Portage County:** Prepared and distributed a water quality calendar.

Myths and Facts

Myth: Livestock farms are unregulated.

Fact: Ohio's regulatory structure:

- Ohio Agricultural Pollution Abatement Program
- Livestock Environmental Permitting Program
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
- Certified Livestock Manager Credentialing
- Senate Bill 150 training and certification
- Senate Bill 1 manure application restrictions

Ohio has one of the most comprehensive regulatory systems in the nation. It starts with the mandate that no Ohio farm can pollute the waters of the state, and there are penalties if pollution occurs.

Myth: Farm Bureau opposes all regulation.

Fact: The organization's efforts have been aimed at making sure that regulations, when they make sense, actually work.

Myth: All Ohio pollution prevention programs are voluntary.

Fact: Voluntary actions, like those outlined in this report, are in addition to regulations. Trends show farmers willingly stepping up when new ways to effectively protect water are identified.

The actions in this report summarize 2019. As a reminder, many projects, research and legislation were underway well before last year.

- Ohio Farm Bureau provided funding for Ohio State University Extension specialists to work with farmers in the Western Lake Erie Basin to develop Nutrient Management Plans;
- Farm Bureau supported new, workable nutrient management laws (SB 1 and SB 150);
- Farm Bureau facilitated a private drinking water well water quality testing program;
- Farm Bureau collaborated with the Ohio Corn Marketing Program, Ohio Small Grains Marketing Program, Ohio Soybean Council and industry partners through the Ohio AgriBusiness Association to invest substantial financial resources in research and education. A notable project is edge-of-field monitoring research led by the Ohio State University, in cooperation with the USDA-ARS, to measure nutrients that are leaving the fields in an effort to identify best management practices for mitigating runoff;
- Under the leadership of the Ohio AgriBusiness Association and in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the agriculture community in Ohio launched the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program, a concerted effort to significantly reduce applied nutrients from running off fields and into the water resources in the Western Lake Erie Basin. The independent certification program encourages agricultural retailers, service providers and other certified professionals to adopt proven 4R Nutrient Stewardship best practices, which refers to applying the Right Source of nutrients, at the Right Rate, at the Right Time and in the Right Place.