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DEP and County Conservation Districts Collaborating on Farm Inspection Details in Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Harrisburg, PA – In a briefing to the State Conservation Commission (SCC) today, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) officials will discuss details of the collaboration between DEP and county conservation districts to conduct farm inspections in the Chesapeake Bay watershed as part of the recently announced “Bay Reboot” strategy.

DEP announced the strategy in January. It was developed in conjunction with the Pennsylvania departments of Agriculture, and Conservation and Natural Resources, and the State Conservation Commission. The strategy relies on a mix of technical and financial assistance for farmers, improved technology, expanded data gathering, improved program coordination and capacity and – when necessary – stronger enforcement and compliance measures.

The Tom Wolf administration sought additional resources from the federal government, and has been working with farm organizations to assist in capturing on-the-farm data of best management practices throughout the bay watershed. Capturing this data is essential to Pennsylvania receiving full credit in the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) model, which is used to measure progress toward pollution reduction goals.

DEP Secretary John Quigley and Veronica Kasi, program manager of DEP’s newly formed Chesapeake Bay Program Office, will deliver the update to SCC members at their statewide meeting in Harrisburg and provide a timeline for implementation.

“With valuable feedback from our partners, DEP has developed a draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and inspection report form for conservation district and agency staff to follow when completing field inspections as called for as part of the reboot strategy,” Quigley said. “DEP will send pre-inspection letters to farmers to make them aware of the inspection program and afford them an opportunity to demonstrate compliance prior to a field inspection.”

In December 2010, EPA developed a total maximum daily load (TMDL) for the Chesapeake Bay in response to court orders and the federal Clean Water Act, which requires Pennsylvania to reduce annual discharges of nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment entering the bay watershed. These reductions are needed to meet water quality standards by 2025. The Bay Reboot strategy is a recognition by the Wolf administration that a “mid-course change in direction,” or refocus of work, is necessary because Pennsylvania will not reach the goals as described in the current Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP).

Quigley said DEP also just finished pilot-testing the draft SOP this month in a few counties. The results of this pilot testing, along with other comments received from conservation district and agency staff, will be used to finalize this draft SOP, which can be found on DEP’s website [here](#). Once finalized, DEP and conservation district staff will be provided with formal training before full implementation of the program in July.

County conservation district staff have had a role in compliance inspections under the Chapter 83 Nutrient Management and Chapter 102 Erosion & Sedimentation regulatory programs for decades. As part of the Bay Reboot strategy, conservation district staff will shift their focus from conducting 100 educational farm visits to conducting 50 farm inspections each year. The inspections will

initially focus on ensuring farmers have implemented manure management and erosion and sedimentation plans as well as identifying any significant water quality problems.

“We want to make sure conservation district staff have all the tools and training they need to properly conduct these inspections while continuing their invaluable work of providing our farm community with compliance assistance,” Quigley said. “This collaborative approach with input from all of our partners will be key to our success in improving our water quality.”

The strategy centers around six elements:

- Put high-impact, low-cost Best Management Practices (BMPs) on the ground, and quantify undocumented BMPs in watersheds impaired by agriculture or stormwater.
- Improve reporting, record keeping and data systems to provide better and more accessible documentation.
- Address nutrient reduction by meeting EPA’s goal of inspecting 10 percent of farms in the watershed, ensuring development and use of manure management and agricultural erosion and sediment control plans, and enforcement for non-compliance.
- Identify legislative, programmatic or regulatory changes to provide the additional tools and resources necessary to meet federal pollution reduction goals by 2025.
- Obtain additional resources for water quality improvement.
- Establish a Chesapeake Bay Office to coordinate the development, implementation and funding of the commonwealth’s Chesapeake Bay efforts.

The draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and related materials on Pennsylvania’s Chesapeake Bay Program can be found [here](#).

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