



Former USDA official urges Farm Bill measures that protect drinking water sources

November 8, 2017

(Manhattan, Kansas) -- Speaking before the Governor's Conference on the Future of Water in Kansas, the former chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), explained how the upcoming Farm Bill can advance collaborations that protect source water.

David White, speaking on behalf of the American Water Works Association (AWWA), detailed how water providers and farmers can form partnerships that are supported by NRCS and other USDA programs. He provided examples of past successes that benefited both farmers and downstream communities.

"Every year, voluntary, private land conservation programs spend about \$6 billion and make incredible advances in natural resource protection," White said. "The American Water Works Association is seeking to ensure that at least 10 percent of those funds – some \$600 million a year – is spent on protecting the drinking water that Americans use every day."

AWWA is urging U.S. Congress to reauthorize the Farm Bill to:

- Provide robust funding for the conservation title;
- Emphasize protecting source water in all conservation programs;
- Expand opportunities for the NRCS to work with water systems to prioritize source water protection activities in each state;
- Increase benefits for farmers who employ practices that benefit downstream water quality; and
- Ensure at least 10 percent of conservation program funds are focused on the protection of drinking water.

"Cooperative activities represent the best path forward to achieve water quality improvements," White said.

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Established in 1881, the American Water Works Association is the largest nonprofit, scientific and educational association dedicated to managing and treating water, the world's most important resource. With approximately 50,000 members, AWWA provides solutions to improve public health, protect the environment, strengthen the economy and enhance our quality of life.



AWWA calls for Farm Bill measures that protect drinking water sources, encourage partnerships

October 10, 2017

(WASHINGTON, DC) – With excess nutrients impacting water quality nationwide, the American Water Works Association (AWWA) today urged U.S. Congress to use the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization to help farmers and water utilities work together to protect the nation’s drinking water.

Large algal blooms resulting from nutrients have threatened water quality throughout the country, including shutting down the drinking water supply for the entire city of Toledo, Ohio, in 2014.

“Water utilities and farmers are eager to collaborate on projects that protect public health and the environment, reduce the cost of water treatment and help farmers succeed,” said Tracy Mehan, AWWA executive director of government affairs. “Our nation’s farmers do heroic work to put food on the tables of Americans every day. There’s an opportunity through the Farm Bill to encourage partnerships that allow them to meet their production goals while protecting our nation’s drinking water.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides funding to encourage implementing conservation practices on agricultural land. While these programs have been effective at addressing a host of environmental issues, historically they have been under-utilized in tackling drinking water concerns. AWWA is advocating that the reauthorized Farm Bill:

- Provide robust overall funding for the conservation title.
- Emphasize protecting water to safeguard public health.
- Expand opportunities for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to work with water systems to prioritize activities in each state.
- Increase benefits for farmers who employ practices that benefit downstream water quality.
- Ensure at least 10 percent of conservation program funds, Title 2 in the Farm Bill, is focused on the protection of drinking water.

“As we work to complete a new Farm Bill in the coming year, we need to identify and provide financial and technical resources to landowners and land managers to protect and conserve our natural resources,” said John Larson, Senior Vice President of Policy and Programs at American Farmland Trust. “Collaboration with the American Water Works Association to identify opportunities for farmers and ranchers to protect drinking water for communities helps to build a larger coalition of supporters for conservation and the Farm Bill.”

Innovative water utilities are already partnering with farming operations to protect their water supplies using programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). In Northwest Arkansas, an alliance of agricultural, water and environmental stakeholders received \$4.3 million from NRCS and provided another \$4.3 million in local and state contributions – both cash and in-kind – to rehabilitate a river and implement on-farm conservation practices.

“The Farm Bill currently provides the best opportunity to bring significant resources to the table to protect drinking water,” said Alan Fortenberry, CEO of Beaver Water District, Ark., a key leader in the Arkansas alliance.

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the utility is working with 15 partners – including the Iowa Soybean Association – to adopt practices that protect the city’s water supply. The partners are contributing \$2.3 million in technical and financial assistance and the NRCS is providing another \$2.1 million.

AWWA, the largest association of water professionals in the world, is sharing case studies that highlight agriculture-utility collaborations through its publications, conferences and other learning opportunities. The Farm Bill work – and the broader issue of protecting water supplies – will be among the key issues AWWA members bring to Capitol Hill next spring during the 2018 Water Matters! Fly In.

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