

## **MINUTES**

### **AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD**

**Rachel Carson State Office Building  
Room 105, First Floor Conference Room  
Harrisburg, PA**

**June 19, 2002**

Chairperson Larry Breech, PA Farmers Union, called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.

#### **Attendance**

##### **Members**

Chairperson Larry Breech, PA Farmers Union  
Frank Long, PA Association of Conservation Districts  
Lyle Forer, PA Department of Agriculture  
Gerald Seyler, Grain Producer  
Carl Shaffer, Vegetable Producer  
Bill Adams, PA Farm Bureau  
Tom Andrews, House, Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee (Rep. Daly)  
Dr. Herb Cole, Penn State University  
Tom Williams, Dairy Producer  
Dave Irvin, Fruit Producer  
Stacy Mitchell, USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Bruce Holbrook, PA Department of Environmental Protection

##### **Agencies, Advisors, and Guests**

Bill Achor, Wenger's Feed Mill, Inc.  
Annette Ehrhorn, Wenger's Feed Mill, Inc.  
Barry Smith, Manor Township, Lancaster County  
Chris Allen, DEP, Public Participation Coordinator  
Dr. Jack Watson, Penn State University  
Kelly O'Neill, Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Patricia Grim, DEP, Office of Policy  
Carl Rohr, DEP, Bureau of Watershed Management  
Michele Corbin, PA Landscape and Nursery Association  
Dan Snowden, DEP, Citizens Advisory Council  
Julia Bahn, Intern, Senate, Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee (Sen. Waugh)  
Cedric Karper, DEP, Bureau of Watershed Management  
Bob Gibson, DEP, Bureau of Watershed Management  
Scott Perry, DEP, Office of Regulatory Counsel  
Richard Sheibly, DEP, Bureau of Laboratories  
Walt Peechatka, PennAg Industries Association  
Amy Van Blarcom, PennAg Industries Association

John Hines, DEP, Office of Policy  
Dean Auchenbach, DEP, Bureau of Watershed Management

### **Public Comment Period**

There were no public comments made.

### **Action on the April 17, 2002 Meeting Minutes**

The minutes were approved as mailed.

### **Update on the Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Act (Act 25 of 2002)**

Scott Perry, DEP, Bureau of Regulatory Counsel, and Richard Sheibley, DEP, Bureau of Laboratories, noted the Governor signed the Environmental Accreditation Program Act (Act 25 of 2002) on April 2, 2002. This Act establishes an accreditation program within DEP for laboratories that generate data and analysis for permit holders and for tests required by environmental statute. All laboratories that conduct environmental testing must register with DEP by October 2, 2002 and pay the \$50.00 registration fee. The Act also creates an 11 member advisory committee to provide technical assistance to the Department in the development of the regulations to implement the Act. The first meeting of the advisory committee has been scheduled for August 3, 2002. The goal of this Act is to ensure we have qualified and verifiable data from laboratories. The Act will also result in the focus and responsibility shifting from the permittee to the laboratory facility. Some Board members expressed concerns that the costs of testing by these laboratories would increase due to the Act and the increase would be passed onto the customers.

### **Appointment of a Board Representative to Serve on the Agricultural Workgroup for the Non-Point Source Liaison Workgroup**

Carl Rohr, DEP, Bureau of Watershed Management, noted in 1996 the non-point source management plan called for the formation of a Non-Point Source Liaison Workgroup with six separate workgroups to address the issue of non-point source pollution. Bob Pardoe, Jr., who has resigned from the Board, represented the Agricultural Advisory Board on the Agricultural workgroup. Carl asked for a volunteer from the Board to replace Pardoe on the workgroup that meets 2-4 times a year. Gerald Seyler, Grain Producer, volunteered to represent the Board on the Agricultural Workgroup. Chairperson Larry Breech appointed Gerald Seyler as the Board representative and requested that he attend the workgroup's next meeting on August 9, 2002.

### **Environmental Action Plans for the Environmental Futures Planning Process**

Cedric Karper, DEP, Bureau of Watershed Management, reviewed the priority objectives of the Environmental Futures Planning Process. These items included water resources; stormwater; watershed restoration (Total Maximum Daily Loads); source water

protection; Chesapeake Bay Program (update nutrient reduction strategy); riparian buffers in the Bay watershed; building conservation district support and expanding capacity of conservation districts; groundwater monitoring; and drinking water source assessment. Karper noted that the action plans are available for review on the DEP website.

### **Principles Related to Groundwater Recharge**

Dr. Jack Watson, Penn State University Cooperative Extension Service, reviewed the principles related to groundwater recharge with the Board. Board members requested this topic at a previous Board meeting during discussions related to water resources legislation. Dr. Watson explained there is limited information available on groundwater recharge and how groundwater moves through the soil. Dr. Watson has done research on this topic in Arizona for 20 years before coming to Pennsylvania. He informed the Board that when looking at groundwater you need to look at four dimensions, height, width, length, and time. Gravity movement and capillary action accounts for most water movement in soil. He then showed a video entitled “How Water Moves Through the Soil” which highlighted the principles of groundwater recharge and movement.

Dr. Watson demonstrated that studies have shown that there is an extreme amount of variability of groundwater recharge due to agricultural practices. To date, not much research has been done in Pennsylvania on groundwater recharge due to abundant water resources and little competition for these resources. Dr. Herb Cole remarked that farmers in Pennsylvania provide land area for groundwater recharge and should receive credit for groundwater recharge. Chairperson Larry Breech asked if Dr. Watson would be available as a resource person to consult with the Board’s Water Resources Legislation Committee on the proposed water resources legislation. Tom Williams observed that the presentation showed what happens to groundwater in the top several feet of the earth, but the real question is what happens to the groundwater, and how does it move several hundred feet deep in the ground.

### **DEP’s Environmental Future Indicator Teams**

John Hines, DEP, Office of Policy, informed the Board that the Environmental Futures Program has been transferred to the Office of Policy to provide additional staff and a broader prospective to the process. Hines noted the DEP Central Office has developed action plans based on 3 goals and 17 environmental indicators. The six DEP Regional Offices (with the assistance of 34 watershed teams) have developed regional action plans. The Office of Policy is currently reviewing and categorizing these action plans. Several environmental indicator teams including stormwater and flooding, land use, water resources, groundwater and drinking water, waste, energy, mineral extraction, and stewardship have been created to formulate actions and provide support. Next year the 17 statewide environmental indicators will be observed to see if we are hitting the mark. Hines stated the role of advisory boards and committee’s would be to review, assess, and provide input in this process.

## **Composting 101**

As a follow-up to the presentation at the April Board meeting on the work of the Organics Recycling Task Force, Bill Achor, Wenger's Feed Mill Inc., provided a power-point presentation on the composting process. Achor covered what compost is; how the composting process works; compost biology and the key process variables; the financial costs and benefits; the uses of compost; and potential problems with compost. Achor also reminded Board members that the overall goal of the Recycling Task Force is to increase awareness so that there is an increased demand for compost and to increase the recycling rate of organics. The next meeting of the Organics Recycling Task Force, which is open to the public, is July 17, 2002. Lyle Forer questioned whether Wenger's Feed Mill did composting. Achor responded that they are currently doing mortality composting. Frank Long noted that on July 25 the Southern Allegheny RC&D will be hosting a composting workshop.

### **Presentation of the Pennsylvania Environmental Agricultural Conservation Certificate for Excellence (PEACCE) Program**

Amy Van Blarcom, PennAg Industries Association, provided an overview of the Pennsylvania Environmental Agricultural Conservation Certificate for Excellence (PEACCE) Program. The PEACCE Program is a voluntary industry based program, whose mission is to promote the use of agricultural practices that are consistent with good environmental stewardship, and to recognize those producers who meet the requirements for certification established by the PEACCE Program. The program consists of three components, an environmental awareness course, an on-farm assessment and environmental review, and an on-farm certification.

The environmental awareness course was developed by Penn State University and consists of a four-module curriculum focusing on environmental awareness, manure application, odor and emissions, and laws and regulations. To date 550 people have taken the environmental awareness course. The second step in the program is a voluntary and free on-farm assessment conducted by two certified assessors who look at the total operation to assess water quality, odor, pest risk factors, and nutrient management. A confidential report is completed listing the challenges and the strengths of the operation. To date 150 farms have been assessed. If the farmer wants to proceed with the PEACCE Program they must address the high risks identified in the report and submit a report to the county conservation district. The conservation district will then conduct an on-farm certification to ensure the operation is in compliance with the required permits and regulations. Once a farm is certified they must continue to practice and manage their operation as a good steward of the land and they must complete continuing education every three years to maintain their certification.

The goal of the PEACCE Program is to encourage good relationships with neighbors and the community; to mitigate and/or minimize the risk of litigation; provide possible insurance benefits for the producer; statewide recognition; and an opportunity to practice

agriculture in an environmentally safe manner. The state is currently testing a pilot of this program in Berks, Chester, and Lancaster counties. Twenty-one farms have completed the process and have been certified under the pilot program. These operators will be recognized at the July 23 meeting of the PA Association of Conservation Districts. The PEACCE Program will be made available statewide now that the pilot process has been completed.

### **Comments/Issues/Concerns of the Board**

Carl Shaffer voiced his concern over the fact that Chairperson Larry Breech was quoted in a newspaper article stating that a farm following the Act 6, Nutrient Management Regulations will still allow for contamination of the groundwater. Larry Breech acknowledged making the statement and stated that agriculture needs to use new technologies to maximize the use of manure and fertilizers. He noted as an example of new technologies the activated microbial windrow manure composting study conducted by the Pocono RC&D, Columbia and Lackawanna Conservation Districts, and Bloomsburg University in 1998. Judith Kipe-Nolt of Bloomsburg University provided a presentation at the February 1999 meeting of the Advisory Board regarding the results of this study. Carl Shaffer then requested a copy of the March 1998 study.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 1:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dean M. Auchenbach  
DEP Liaison to the Board