

# Policy Advisory Group Report

## Members

- Albert Armand
- Bryan Bays
- Roger Hadley
- David Hardin
- Aaron Johnson
- Clark Jordan
- George Kakasuleff
- Bobbi Kincaid
- Doug Lindauer
- Jack Maloney
- Tom Milligan
- Joe Russell
- Mike Starkey

## Nutrient Policy Advisory Group

The nutrient policy advisory group met on March 17 and reviewed outreach materials to educate farmers about the need to manage agricultural production to keep nutrients in the field and out of water. The materials, developed as part of the Nutrient Management/Soil Health Strategy, are supported by Farm Bureau, the agricultural commodity groups, the Agribusiness Council and Purdue.

PAG members expressed concern over the meaning of baseline data used in the educational materials. The data was from a statewide survey conducted by Purdue. PAG members were especially concerned that only 27 percent of farmers said they use nutrient management plans. Consensus was that few farmers are not doing calculations, and farmers probably answered based upon what they believe an NMP entails and not on what they do. INFB's Justin Schneider noted that the public messaging on that issue includes that concern, as well as the goal that all farmers use NMPs.

The members discussed the importance of edge-of-field monitoring data to drive decisions regarding nutrient loss. It was noted that preliminary results highlight the importance of timing of applications and that various factors, such as organic matter, are important to keeping nutrients where applied.

Schneider presented an update on a project the ag groups and Purdue are pursuing in the Western Lake Erie Basin to implement the Nutrient Management/Soil Health Strategy. The goals of the project are:

- Use a project coordinator to target farmers who need support.
- Reduce nutrient loss through adoption of practices to fit farmer need.
- Monitor program effectiveness and demonstrate long-term water quality improvement.

The project will target practices to farmers based upon their needs and create an atmosphere of learning and collaboration. Ag groups and Purdue are contributing financial resources and staff expertise to the project, while seeking grants to complete the funding needs.

The PAG reviewed policy to revise it into a *we support/we oppose* format that is easier for members and staff to understand and use. The reformatting included suggested deletions of non-action items language that was duplicative of others in the book.

Finally, the members discussed the future of the Nutrient PAG. It was determined that this group had accomplished the goals set for it when it began meeting in 2012. The PAG had numerous successes:

- Revised policy to reflect current concerns.
- Debated the benefits and challenges created with various ag practices.
- Advised on strategies to target nutrient loss reduction.
- Served as a focus group for creation of materials and messaging to educate farmers on nutrient management.
- Participated in development of surveys regarding nutrient management and conservation practice decisions by farmers.
- Served as liaisons for Farm Bureau on various activities related to nutrients and water quality.

The nutrient PAG will be dissolved this summer after reviewing policy recommendations that come in from counties on nutrient related issues. However, the members all volunteered to stay engaged on nutrient issues and are willing to serve if the need arises to pull them back together.

### **CALL TO ACTION**

As part of the effort to expand awareness of nutrient related water quality issues and potential threats to agricultural practices caused by regulation or litigation, several opportunities for farmer engagement have been identified.

#### ***Members and county Farm Bureaus are asked to***

- Consider opportunities to support the education of farmers about nutrient management and soil health by supporting local field days hosted by ag retailers, conservation organizations or agencies, such as NRCS or SWCD.

#### ***County Farm Bureaus can***

- Host educational discussions for farmers on nutrient management and soil health, or lead policy development on nutrient management, soil health and water quality issues with participation from Justin Schneider or nutrient PAG members.

#### ***Farmers are asked to***

- Consider how their farming practices may contribute to nutrient loss from fields, and make management decisions that minimize loss to the extent practical.

#### ***Farmers can***

- Participate in watershed water quality improvement projects or partner in on-farm research to help better understand how management practices can impact nutrient loss.

Questions regarding the activities of the nutrient PAG can be directed to one of the group members or to [Justin Schneider](#), 317-692-7835, the Farm Bureau staff member facilitating the group.