

Pass a Farm Bill that Prioritizes Clean Water

The Alliance for the Great Lakes requests of Congress:

Farm Bill programs under the Conservation Title are designed to prevent or limit farm runoff from polluting waterways. Congress should amend programs in this Title to maximize the return on taxpayer investments by:

- Increasing funding for U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP);
- Emphasizing accountability by conditioning the receipt of funding under programs like EQIP on implementation of best management practices (such as the use of cover crops, nutrient management planning, reduced tillage, and crop rotations) and prioritizing EQIP funding on practices that demonstrate results;
- Implementing a performance-based model that pays farmers according to the environmental benefit of an environmental practice, thereby maximizing water quality benefits with the available funding.

Background: Agricultural pollution poses significant risks to human and environmental health throughout the Great Lakes Basin.

Excessive nutrients – particularly nitrogen and phosphorus – from fertilizers and manure fuel algal blooms throughout the Great Lakes region. These algal blooms can lead to low-oxygen environments that harm aquatic ecosystems and human health. Algal blooms also harm local economies by negatively impacting local tourism and hospitality sectors and increasing drinking water rates, as ratepayers end up bearing the cost of monitoring and treating algal blooms in drinking water sources. Finally, the prolific application of manure for fertilizer and waste disposal contributes to bacterial (i.e. E. coli) pollution throughout the Basin, which brings a series of human health concerns for those recreating or using local water (ground or surface) for drinking water.

The Farm Bill is the largest investment in the U.S. food system. It is also the primary vehicle for investing in on-farm conservation efforts to mitigate the human and

environmental health effects of modern industrial agriculture. While the Farm Bill has directed billions of dollars into conservation efforts to improve water quality, current investments in states like Ohio and Michigan are still woefully inadequate to meet phosphorus reduction targets in the Western Basin of Lake Erie.

This year's Farm Bill offers an opportunity to make meaningful changes that can dramatically influence the efficacy of its programs and create real, meaningful, and long-lasting positive impacts to both our nation's agricultural industry and the water resources we all rely on. It's clear from years of research and water quality monitoring that we are not meeting state and federal goals to protect water resources. Making these key changes in the next Farm Bill will better position us to produce needed agricultural products and protect water quality — a win-win that will benefit the Great Lakes and those who depend on them today and for generations to come.

