



CALCULATE YOUR PAYBACK ON A THUNDER CREEK TRAILER?



Chris Clayton DTN Ag Policy Editor

Iowa Water Quality Battles Continue

The battle over water quality in Iowa continues to intensify.

Associated Press reported Tuesday that Des Moines officials could sue if state and federal officials don't limit nitrate levels from farm runoff.

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey told DTN in a brief interview earlier this week that Iowa has just begun to implement its new Nutrient Reduction Strategy meant to address some of the nitrate problems. Northey said he believes a voluntary, science-based approach is the best strategy for reducing runoff. Northey indicated it's time to demonstrate how best conservation practices can work.

"Our desire is to show they are going well and to be able to get these practices on the farm," Northey said. "We also want to show that farmers instituting these practices on their own are a more effective way of getting things done than a regulatory agency in Washington trying to prescribe what every farmer should do in their fields out there. I just don't think that's the right mechanism."

Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy was finalized in May after being released last fall and opened for public comment. The program was prompted by Iowa's work with the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan involving states in the Mississippi River basin. The goal of the strategy is to reduce nitrates from both point sources and non-point sources, including farms. For non-point sources, the strategy calls for a 41% statewide reduction in nitrogen and a 29% reduction in phosphorus loads. To meet such goals, Iowa farmers will have to dramatically expand some conservation practices across the state.

As part of the program, the Iowa Legislature approved \$2.4 million for the current fiscal year and \$4.4 million for 2014. Another \$10 million in one-time money can be spent over the next five years. Another \$7 million in cost-share funds also will help as well. That doesn't include another \$1.5 million for a research center at Iowa State University.

In putting in a plug for the farm bill, Northey also said USDA conservation programs will play a key role in helping farmers reduce runoff as well.

"There are certainly some conservation programs that are part of the farm bill that are good fits with what we are doing," Northey said. "USDA has been interested in partnering on some pieces. We're certainly interested in that as well."

The City of Des Moines Water Works has been ramping up the pressure over nitrogen issues as water treatment costs have increased. Bill Stowe, who oversees the city's water works, told AP the city is spending about \$7,000 per day to remove nitrates from the water. That's largely due to EPA requirements on the amount of nitrates allowed in drinking water.

"Our ability to meet the drinking water standard is perilously close to being violated," Stowe told AP.

Stowe and other officials took part in a rally at the Iowa Capitol on Tuesday to highlight the issue.

Last week, members of the Ag Clean Water Alliance board of directors met with Stowe, but disagreed with his assessment and the way Iowa is implementing its voluntary nutrient reduction program and its potential results.

"A regulatory scheme won't bring us the results that we want and need," said ACWA President Harry Ahrenholtz. "Our members are in the business that drives efficient food production and Iowa's economy. Our members are also committed to achieving water quality that meets everyone's needs."

The Ag Clean Water Alliance attributed Des Moines' current problems to a shift in weather patterns as Iowa came out of a drought

The Ag Clean Water Alliance attributed Des Moines' current problems to a shift in weather patterns as Iowa came out of a drought last year to face record rainfall in some parts of the country that delayed or prevented planting of crops across much of the state. The group indicated new standards should not be developed, given that the nutrient-management program is just now getting off the ground.

More information on Iowa's nutrient management strategy can be found at [http://www.nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu/...](http://www.nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu/)

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Posted at 1:57PM CDT 07/03/13 by Chris Clayton

Comments (1)

Of course the \$7,000 figure comes at a peak. As a member of Iowa Farm Bureau's Natural Resource Committee, we were told several years ago by a manager of the DM water treatment facility that the cost to remove nitrates from the city's water averaged \$350,000 per year or \$1 per person per year. That official went on to shrug and conclude with a statement that this amount paled in comparison to the dollars of crops produced in their watershed. More recently, however, another manager (probably Stowe) of the water facility addressed IFBF and tersely insisted that we cut off all of our tile lines. The very liberal, ag-hating Des Moines Register will support Stowe full time. Agriculture realized a year ago that the drought would leave substantial residual N. What is Des Moines going to do, sue to stop drought?!

Posted by Curt Zingula at 6:44AM CDT 07/05/13

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