



Better land practices, cleaner water

Ohio bill creates certification program as first step toward reducing fertilizer-caused algal blooms polluting state's waterways

by Ohio Sen. Cliff Hite (<http://www.ohiosenate.gov/hite/contact>)

In the spring of 2013, the directors of Ohio's Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources, and Environmental Protection Agency came to me in my role as the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee and introduced plans to limit the overabundance of nutrients in our soil — and thus our waterways, streams, lakes and ponds.

With an ever-growing problem of algal blooms polluting Ohio's water systems, it became evident that something had to be done to reduce the phosphorus, nitrogen and other materials that were exacerbating the situation. The evidence has been obvious in the West Basin of Lake Erie and other lakes in Ohio.

The agricultural community was getting the most blame for the algal bloom pollution in Ohio. We believed that legislation originating from Ohio's agricultural leaders to reduce nutrients in the soil would be the first step in trying to resolve this escalating problem.

SB 150, which Gov. John Kasich recently signed, is a bill involving all stakeholders, and one that received no opposition as a finished product.

Early disagreements resolved

Trust me, there was plenty of consternation during early committee hearings on this bill. However, with input from local farmers and our state's agricultural leaders, SB 150 came together with support from all parties.

The bill is, foremost, an education bill patterned after the established pesticide-certification process. SB 150 now requires those who apply

Controlling nutrients remains high priority in federal Great Lakes protection

Starting in 2010, the federal government began making a historic, unprecedented commitment to Great Lakes restoration and protection. Under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, well over \$1 billion has flowed to the Great Lakes for local, state and regionwide projects.

Reducing nutrient runoff into the Great Lakes system, and thus preventing harmful algal blooms, has been a funding priority ever since the initiative began. GLRI dollars have been used to bolster the green infrastructure of coastline cities, enroll more land in agricultural conservation programs, and help farmers adopt sound nutrient-management plans.

A new draft plan for the GLRI (for fiscal years 2015 and 2019) was released earlier this year; it has eight long-term goals for the Great Lakes system.



LONG-TERM GOALS FOR GREAT LAKES

- 1) Fish safe to eat
- 2) Water safe for recreation
- 3) Safe source of drinking water
- 4) All Areas of Concern delisted
- 5) Harmful/nuisance algal blooms eliminated
- 6) No new self-sustaining invasive species
- 7) Existing invasive species controlled
- 8) Native habitat protected and restored to sustain native species

SB 150 requires those who apply fertilizer to obtain certification every three years by taking a course on nutrient management.

fertilizer to obtain certification every three years through an efficient educational course.

The course contains information on various aspects of fertilizer handling and application, including what is known as “the 4 R's of nutrient management” — the right fertilizer source, at the right time, in the right place, and the right rate — as well as the latest research on improving water quality in the state's lakes and streams.

The bill includes farms of 50 acres or more and focuses on fertilizer.

We attempted to streamline this process as much as possible; the buyer of fertilizer does not need certification if he is not the applicator, and the educational program will be held by the Ohio Extension Offices and offered throughout the year.

The charge for these educational sessions will be set at no greater than \$35, and all aspects of this bill will be under the authority of the state Department of Agriculture.

The deadline to have certification is September 2017; anyone may be certified before that date if he or she wishes.

I have recommended that our agricultural community should set their own certification dates to have them correspond with the required pesticide certification.

It is my understanding that Ohio is the first state to take this approach to curbing our algae problems.

We are all aware that this move will not com-

pletely end our state's problems with algal blooms, but we are anticipating improvement over the next few years thanks to the leadership of Ohio's agricultural community.

We looked at this as a way for the agricultural world to put a positive foot forward, with the goal of inspiring other entities to ante up and kick in to address the problem.

There are numerous contributors to the algal bloom problem in Ohio, but our agricultural community felt the brunt of the responsibility and came up with a start in the right direction.

I am proud to have been a part of this groundbreaking legislation. 🇺🇸

Sen. Cliff Hite, a Republican from Findlay, was appointed to the Ohio Senate in 2011 after serving as a state representative from 2007-2011. Sen. Hite also serves on the Midwestern Legislative Conference Executive Committee.

Submissions welcome

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Causes of harmful algal blooms

- ✓ Warm temperatures and abundant sunlight
- ✓ Increased presence of phosphorus due to agricultural practices such as the high use of fertilizer or the presence of livestock near water supplies
- ✓ Effluent and runoff from towns near waterways
- ✓ Use of pesticides and other chemicals which affect organisms that would otherwise control algal growth

Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Center of Excellence for Great Lakes and Human Health

Effects of harmful algal blooms

- ✓ Produce dangerous toxins that can sicken or kill people and animals
- ✓ Foul coastlines and close beaches
- ✓ Create “dead zones” in waterways that impact the ecosystem and state fishing and tourism industries
- ✓ Raise costs related to the treatment of drinking water
- ✓ Hurt industries that depend on clean water

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency