October 25, 2012 Meeting With Agricultural Business

Attendees: 3

These summaries reflect a range of views expressed on the issues as discussed during informal conversation in small focus group meetings. They do not reflect the formal or public position of any one group of people, organization or coalition. All errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of EMC/CBI.

Italics contain comments from attendees that are indicative of common elements, themes and sentiments expressed. The conversations were not recorded and, therefore, they may not be verbatim quotations.

I. What Practices Work Well on Farms to Improve Water Quality?

A. Cover crops have been successful—keeps the soil up, the nitrogen is not leached out. Its successful because its effective and easy to have farms adopt the practice, and there is a cost share for it.

B. The larger farms—200 cows and up all have nutrient management plans and they have addressed a lot of these issues on the farms. They are following the BMPs and have good management practices.

II. What Practices Are Not Working Well?

A. Dairy has done a lot to improve practices but the question is whether this had made a significant difference, the lake looks worse than it ever did – worse than in the last 50 years. This is against a backdrop of fewer total numbers of farms and more organic farms.

How is it that despite this, agriculture is still considered to be the major offender?

B. The financial issues are challenging.

There is no money to fix this on the farms not when the price of inputs to the price of milk is what it is today.

C. Smaller farms need better oversight.

Some of the worst offenders are the small non-dairy farms

D. Not much support in the state in general for commercial agriculture, for example there are no supportive services for farmers; lab testing facilities have closed down. Facilities need to support technical side in order to make this work better

E. Should money be spent on farms where it's not clear whether the farm will be viable over the short or medium term? To determine whether it is economically a good idea to support a farm with an expensive program or cost share should ask for a lender's endorsement.

III. Feedback on Practices, Regulations & Ideas to Improve Water Quality

A. Nutrient Management Plans on Small Farms: If you want nutrient management plans on more farms how will you fund it? Not only do they have to be created but then monitored, who will do that? The larger farms are regulated they are not the issue—every time they want to do something it needs to be signed off on-- its those farms that have no oversight and no information about how to manage the farms for this issue that is where the work is needed.

Doing a soil test will tell you only what is there in that moment but not what is happening there. The testing is challenging because right now we don't know which fields have to be targeted, we need better information and an accurate tool for measurement a 590 is expensive but you go field by field and it provides

detailed information about the farm and then farmers can decide what they need to do.

B. Should people who help farms create a nutrient management plan be certified?

Yes because there have to be standards in how farmers are being asked to approach the issue and what the data is saying and what the recommendations are need to have similar training for people to do that should be certified by NRCS.

C. Limiting planting in flood plains, not seen as a big issue.

Farmers are not planting more corn because the cost ratio is not viable, it used to cost $185 to plant an acre of corn, now its $500 per acre.

D. Education and outreach- was seen as a good idea especially with the growth of the buy local movement and rise of local vegetable farmers.

Those non-livestock producers are stewards of the land because whatever they make has to come from the land so they have a reason to pay careful attention to the details, and want to know about erosion and how much fertilizer to use.

IV. Discussion of a Certainty Program

A. A program premised on having farmers commit to specific practices in exchange for certainty that they would not be subject to additional regulations or requirements to implement different management activities during a specified period of time was viewed with skepticism. The primary issue was one of trust—how could a farmer trust that the government would not come back around and ask for additional practices? After a period of time, they would say that circumstances had changed and

farmers would need to do additional practices as well as what they had already been doing.

B. Issues with programs is that the paperwork is too frequent would be better if they did not have constant paperwork to fill out.

C. An incentive program would be more appealing. For example, if a farm reduced the P Index by a certain amount and there was an incentive for the farmer that gave credit for having this result. If the P Index was not reduced, the farmer would need to address it with things like changing from a fall to a spring application or more cover crops. The farmer would need financial assistance to adopt these practices to reduce the P Index and some may find it difficult to like a program that rewards bad offenders. The program needs to reward those that are already doing good things and have been doing them.

D. Certainty program for the larger farms may not have as much appeal because they are already meeting most of the requirements so they need a different incentive.

E. Flexibility—there should be one standard but how you meet the standard should be up to you. Then if later you cannot demonstrate that you meet the standard then EPA can come in and farmer would no longer have flexibility and must do it as they say.

F. Farmers generally know what the issues on the farms are and would like some flexibility on how they address things but the funding says they have to construct a satellite pit—maybe he doesn't want one but he will put one in because that is what can be paid for but the money would be better spent on something else and provide real changes for the farm.

Question is do we have the services in place to support whatever they decide to do—can have a system where every farm has a plan and must follow it but need the people available to write the plans, do the testing, review them? And if the farm falls short how to you address that? Perhaps a claw back by NRCS.

V. **Discussion on Other Ideas**

A. Pennsylvania has a booklet that you can download to help implement a nutrient management plan that works for smaller farms and they have workshops and classes that farmers attend to learn more.

B. NY Equip program is a good model using 590 plans.

You need to look at crop, manure, fertilizer-- it all needs to be done because you will miss too much of the picture of you don't force the farmer to complete the full report.

C. In NY Equip program 80% of the cost is through cost share but it is costly to do the program.

It's thousands for the initial set up and about a thousand plus or minus every year after that.

D. In NY recertification for farms every year for larger farms every three years for medium ones.

Commonly Used Agricultural Terms	
Acronym	**Definition**
BMPs	Best Management Practices
FAPs	Farm Agronomic Practices

TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
LCB	Lake Champlain Basin
AAPs	Accepted Agricultural Practice regulations
MFOs	Medium Farm Operations (200-699 mature animals)
LFOs	Large Farm Operations (700+ mature animals)