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New Map Plots Farmer-Reported Data to Show “Excessive” Soil Phosphorus Levels at All But One of 60 Large Poultry Farms in Six Eastern Shore Counties Due to Excessive Manure Usage

Without Better Phosphorus Management on Farms, Maryland Will Not Meet its Responsibility Under the Chesapeake Bay Pollution Diet

A [new interactive map](#) from the Center for Progressive Reform (CPR) and the Chesapeake Commons demonstrates that all but one industrial-scale chicken farm on Maryland’s Eastern Shore reported having at least one field saturated with “excessive” soil phosphorus from the spreading of manure. The data on the 60 concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in six counties was obtained from public planning documents from the Maryland Department of the Environment submitted between 2008 and 2014.

When developing required comprehensive nutrient management plans (CNMPs), the 60 CAFOs in Dorchester, Talbot, Caroline, Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset counties took soil samples from 1,022 fields to help plan their fertilization needs over the plan’s five-year term. Of those fields, 803—78 percent—had soil phosphorus levels, known as Fertility Index Values (FIVs), in the excessive range. Excessive values tell farmers they should not apply additional phosphorus since crops are not able to absorb it and it ends up running off of fields, into streams, and eventually into the Chesapeake Bay, causing pollution. Yet, as a new [Environmental Integrity Report found](#), farmers reported applying three times more phosphorus in chicken manure on their fields in 2012 than their crops needed.

New, science-based regulations would limit phosphorus application on farms with excessive soil phosphorus readings. The [map](#), which shows soil phosphorus FIVs on fields on which farmers spread manure, demonstrates that the proposed and widely supported [phosphorus management tool](#) (PMT) is desperately needed.

“Maryland has a huge stake in restoring the health of the Chesapeake Bay, and it won’t get there without addressing the phosphorus pollution running off of farms,” said Rena Steinzor, President of CPR. “The overwhelming phosphorus saturation along the Eastern Shore, which comes from the farmers themselves, cannot be ignored and Governor-elect Larry Hogan should reverse his opposition to the PMT

for the good of the Chesapeake Bay and the millions of people who rely on this national treasure.”

Maryland already derives billions of dollars from the Bay, mainly from tourism, and stands to gain \$4.6 billion more annually once the watershed is restored, according to a [Chesapeake Bay Foundation report](#). As part of the Chesapeake Bay-wide [pollution diet](#), a federally led plan to restore the health of the Bay by 2025, Maryland must dramatically reduce water pollutants, including phosphorus. It will not be able to do this without dealing with its excess manure problem. As it stands now, Maryland farms contribute [53 percent](#) of the state’s total phosphorus loading into the Bay, and CAFOs make up a significant part of the problem.

CPR’s research also revealed that failure to develop a required plan appears to be a significant problem in Maryland. MDE’s public database lists 488 registered CAFOs in the six counties, yet the agency only had CNMPs on file for 407, meaning that 17 percent of the CAFOs in the six counties are operating without required plans.

The CNMPs are public under federal law and were obtained through public information request filed with the Maryland Department of the Environment.

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