Date: November 2, 2012 Meeting with Farm Bureau Farmers

Attendees: 33 attendees who signed the sign in sheets

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. Questions Asked At the Meeting From Farmers

A. How and why are there storm water practices?
B. What research exists on keeping rain water out of manure pits?
C. To what extent are tile lines a conduit for nutrients?
D. What effects to beavers have on stream water quality?
E. How is the TMDL determined?
F. Is it runoff from farms or is it runoff from residential and commercial areas affecting agricultural lands?

II. What practices, if any, does your farm conduct to improve water quality?

A. Buffers
B. Fencing- it's a good idea and certainly supported the most by the public.
C. Cover crops
D. Aerate soil
E. No till
F. French drains
G. Pasture rotation
H. Animal rotation
I. Rotational grazing
J. Being aware of soil compaction
K. Pits/stacking
L. Not spreading in the winter

M. Feeding only grass to organic herd
N. Tile drainage
O. Riverside plantings
P. Lagoons
Q. Draglines—but need special equipment
R. Planting trees to hold soil
S. Selective logging to hold soil
T. Grass filter strips (better than wooded ones)
U. Rip rap

III. What Practices Are Not Working Well?

A. Buffers—losing a lot of land to the buffer, questions about nutrients loaded into the buffer and what to do to address this issue.
I have buffers but there is no difference in water – looks exactly the same.

Need buffers to be tailored to elevation issues—I'm losing productive land and it's not necessary because the buffers are not necessarily at the point of run off.

A lot of time it seems the river bank is the high point of the land and a buffer there is not helping water quality but reducing productive land area.

Why do I need a buffer strip on my flat clay field that is the same as for someone with a hilly farm? It just doesn't make a lot of sense.

Horses and buffers in high traffic areas, we need to find a happy medium between buffers and horses.

B. Designating a field as erodible if there is just one section that has a problem—too much land taken out of production.

C. Phosphorous cleaning products are acceptable to use on farms and they are exempt from the phosphorous product ban.

D. Nutrient management system needs better information over time.
Helpful in the beginning but need a better plan to target our resources.

E. No control over number of animals on land-- need to look at density

F. Stream crossings that last
Worked with NRCS to put in stream crossings and they were washed out next day

G. No way to address legacy issues
The lack of management in the past is undoing the good practices of today. There is a lot of flooding these days and there is no control over what goes into the river from streams and banks.

H. Lack of Good Local Assistance for Practices
Engineers are pump crazy, they are over-engineering.
I had to go out of state to find an irrigation specialist.

I. Excessive rain issues occur more frequently and there is no guidance on what to do about those situations.

J. Liquid Manure

K. Time frame for cost share reimbursement/payments—takes way too long.

L. Manure ban dates not tracking with conditions on the farm and weather issues.

M. Gravel used to line ditches- what should be done when it washes downstream? It builds up in the river. It may control erosion but also may impact water flow.

N. Cost Share math is not helpful. The financial cap on programs doesn't make a lot of sense the $5,000 cap hurts a larger farmer far more than the caps affect smaller farms.

O. Expense of equipment for smaller farms.
Practices are not done because they don't know how and can't afford the equipment

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

A. Nutrient management plans for smaller farms**.**

Why not make an NMP or some kind of plan a condition of enrolling the land in current use? We need to qualify to make the land affordable, I have to have a forestry plan in place but conservation Ag land does not need any type of plan.

Needs to be site specific and allow for adjustments to be made as farmers learn to follow plans.

Big farm can afford the practice, smaller farms cannot.

Why are we requiring regulations for larger farms and not smaller ones—why is an acre on a large farm treated differently than one on a smaller farm?

B. Inspections on the farms and increased enforcement would be helpful
Right now this is a complaint driven system, it shouldn't be. They should be able to walk on any farm at any time. Because now the system is that whether you get a visit or not depends only on whom your neighbors are and where your farm is located.

Other farms may be doing worse but no one knows about it.

C. Agreement that standardized regulation would be helpful.
It would be easier to have it standardized.
Like with septic regulations—it's easier and less expensive when applied to everyone

D. Livestock exclusion
-what should be done about invasive species growing along banks?
-is this cost effective?
-very expensive to do, does it really need to be done on every farm?

E. Creating critical source areas and providing those farms with more technological expertise and higher cost share makes sense but recognize the message it sends
If you want to fund with a higher cost share on this farm over here because you have identified this as a critical area that must mean by definition that the farm over there is not in that area and so it must not be as important—therefore, you shouldn't be regulating it like the one in the critical source area.

F. Corn in flood plains
Problematic because people are planting where they shouldn't.
Regulate the corn, has to be off by Sept. 15th then have time to cover crop.
A ban would negatively impact my farm.

G. Affordable cover crop seeds, aerial application, make it easier for smaller farms to have access to needed equipment (e.g. have regional digesters)

H. Subsidize alfalfa to compensate for the loss of corn crops

I. Covers for compost and manure pits

J. Pipeline systems (rolled irrigation)

K. Lift the manure ban—allow for permits for early/late spreading on certain fields or tailor the spreading ban to the weather in any given year.

L. Help subsidize the phosphorous tests and make it more affordable.

M. Methane Digesters can help control high nutrients on the farms, but they are expensive and farms need money to invest and they also get taxed on the electricity they are generating.

N. Outreach and education on AAPs supported

Need to better understand soil issues – clay vs. gravel and how to stop leaching.

Large scale nurseries are big producers of phosphorous—are they educated on water quality issues?

Before and after pictures were great, helped explain the issues use them more.

Help people understand that it is "do-able" and provide technical information so that people know what the practice is, where it works best and why it works.

It's not just farmers, what about people with gardens or just a few animals, they don't know what is expected or what works—rely on companies who sell them things to educate them – a chemical dealer will tell them to use a chemical to address the problem but not what the impact of that is on the environment.

New vegetable farmers coming in – have no idea and small farms need more training and access to resources, cost of land is high cost of insurance and taxes high, they need to be fully employed [in other jobs] to maintain the farm so finding time to attend classes is hard.

V. Discussion of a Certainty Program

A. Trust is a huge issue

-already doing a lot for water quality

-where is the money going to come from and what are the true costs

-legislatures change

I wouldn't trust a contract because I know they can just pass a new law and tell me that what I signed does not address the new law they just passed so my contract doesn't apply and I have to do more.

Don't try and control farmers.

Look at what happened with CLF—don't matter whether they said you had done enough cause that will not be the issue.

B. Could you trade land in one place for land in another?
C. Pick which fields are in the practice or out of it?
D. Better to set the goal post and let farmer figure out his plan
E. Amortize the practice over the course of the investment
   Don't ask us to make changes while we are still paying off the original investment.
F. Need assurance that it is not a moving practice.
G. Need more assistance if you want to put in these practices, farmers want to make sure the money is well invested.
   Depends on how much time it takes and what it costs
H. Cost share accuracy—need a better idea of what farmer will really pay
I. Must ensure it does not become an "unfunded mandate"
J. Who is administering it? Needs to be Department of Ag.
K. Certainty = strong word "for sure" but if you make it voluntary that is a soft word and I don't think it will work
L. Planning for End of Moratorium—what happens after the time period is done? Plan for phasing in compliance with all the regs the farmer avoided having applied to him during the certainty period—would he get a cost share same as others? More? Access to expertise to implement?
M. Flexibility = External factors affecting compliance—what if the practices you agree to don't work? What if beavers knock you out of compliance?
   -Would like ability to renegotiate if the original plan is not working
   -what happens if climate change or natural disaster impacts ability to comply? Could it be conditional?
   What happens if the farmer doesn't follow though?

It's hard when you are doing a practice and you can follow the contract requirements for a couple years but then something happens and you cannot do it for one year because of something like Irene and you get kicked out of the program.

N. Technology advances – what if want to evolve the practice when new things are developed?

O. Flexibility within the contract—make modifications both parties agree—could the farmer get access to further cost share to keep up with changes and new developments?

P. What happens when there is a farm transition? Would new buyers have to comply with the practices?

Q. Win-Win idea—let farmer fix things without penalty

R. Small farmers are financially strapped, what about ability to pay for the certainty?

VI. **Discussion on Other Ideas**

A. Need for better research and data reporting. Many farmers expressed the desire to see the science behind the practice.
I would participate in the research on my farm if I had a written agreement that stated that the data could not be used against me and entitled me to copies of all the info.

What are the hot spots? We need to identify the sources and the specific areas causing problems.

The research so far is not credible, we need better and more accurate research.

B. Do tissue testing rather than soil testing to see what plants take up

C. Storm drains on wood lot roads
D. Land use – could appraise the land differently if there were water quality practices employed
E. Beavers are damming streams up and flooding the land
F. Sediment Redistribution/Stabilization
   Can you find a way to divert sediment from a river to the flood plains? Will make the flood plain more fertile and water quality will benefit since it is out of the river.

   Can you move the sediment from the side of ditches? Otherwise when it rains, it all washes back into the ditch.

G. Whole watershed management planning may be helpful; we need to deal with it as a whole.
H. Include towns in water management
I. Feels like farmers are being asked to bear the burden when neighbors are not
   Why should I have to spend money on projects that I'm told may lower my impact on the lake when the people in my community were allowed to increase their TMDL to account for growth, don't I get to account for growth, too?