



The Point Of "Ag Non Point"

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As a seventh generation farmer who now oversees the State Department of Agriculture and Markets, I know firsthand that farmers throughout the state are great stewards of the land. The Agricultural NonPoint Source Water Pollution Control and Abatement program is something that we commonly refer to as "Ag Non Point." NonPoint Source Water Pollution is runoff from the land that has potential to get into water bodies. Our Ag NonPoint Program helps farmers control this runoff and become even better protectors of the land, all the while improving their own operations.

The program has been around since 1994 and it keeps growing. We're now

headed into our 20th round of funding. What began as a \$300,000 initiative has blossomed into a major \$14 million environmental protection program that helps farmers across the state through something known as the AEM framework. AEM stands for Agricultural Environmental Management. According to the NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee, AEM is "a voluntary, incentive-based framework that helps farmers make common-sense, cost-effective and science-based decisions to help meet business objectives while protecting and conserving the State's natural resources."

At the heart of Ag NonPoint are our friends in local Soil and Water Conservation Districts. As a farmer, I know how valuable a partnership with these Districts can be. Over the years I've relied on them as a precious resource to help my operation. Ag and Markets also relies heavily on these Districts as our eyes and ears on the ground. Through Ag NonPoint, farmers work with Districts to identify potential water runoff issues on their operations and come up with a plan to resolve them.

In March 2013, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced that 209 farms in 27

counties will receive funding through the Ag NonPoint program. Some examples of projects announced in this round of funding include grazing systems to prevent soil erosion, vegetative buffers along streams to filter runoff, and nutrient management systems for watershed protection.

If not appropriately applied or maintained, animal manure, fertilizer or farmstead sources have the potential to get into the watershed. This is nutrient rich pollution. Basically, the same nutrients that foster plant growth on the land have the same potential to foster plant growth in rivers, lakes and streams. Ag NonPoint aims to nip this in the bud before it even enters the watershed.

One way we do that through Ag NonPoint is through cover crops, which are low cost agronomic practices that have a huge bang for the buck. Cover

crops are spread over the land after the main crop is harvested for the chief purpose of protecting the soil.

They are usually annual or perennial grasses that keep soil particles in place and prevent erosion. In turn, these crops build organic matter in the soil that makes for better soil health and healthier crops for the following year, reducing fertilizer costs.

Ag NonPoint also employs best management practices including barnyard runoff management, where local contractors build structures and farmers plant vegetation to avert and treat manure runoff. This in turn can lead to better herd health. We all know that a clean environment for an animal results in a cleaner environment for the watershed.

An assortment of other nutrient management systems prevent nutrient loss from the soil and also decrease runoff in the watershed. By follow-

ing a nutrient management plan and implementing practices, such as manure storage facilities through the Ag NonPoint Program, farmers can then apply and spread those nutrients over larger areas when the soil needs them most. When farmers are using their own nutrients in an efficient way, they save on fertilizer costs. Without such storage capacity, farmers need to apply manure to their fields daily. These nutrient management systems allow farmers to better concentrate on what's most important – running their businesses as efficiently as possible.

I know firsthand that agriculture is a business and it's an important one here in New York State. The Ag NonPoint program does as much for the local farm economy as it does for the environment. I urge you to get to know your county Soil and Water Conservation District to find out more about agricultural environmental management and other District programs.