2014 Chesapeake Bay Agreement to Bring Changes in Funding

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Some people make things happen. Some people observe what is happening. Then other people just stand around, scratching their heads while wondering *what in the world just happened?*

Some folks fall into that last category when it comes to Governor Tomblin signing the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Agreement. West Virginia is on the Agreement, but now what? What changes can be expected? What should West Virginia’s agencies, neighborhoods and agriculturalists be doing now to make the best of coming opportunities?

A copy of the Agreement is not hard to find. In fact, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture displayed copies at several fairs in conjuncture with its booths. It is available online at *chesapeakebay.net/documents*.

The Agreement contains measurable goals and projected outcomes that the Bay Partnership will strive for. It serves as a vision of restoring the Chesapeake Bay through improving the conditions of the watersheds feeding into it. While the Agreement sets this mission, it allows the partners to turn goals into implemented practices.

So what does it all mean for West Virginia?

From the aspect of West Virginia’s agricultural community, reductions of phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment loading are being met. Streamside buffers and fencing, manure storage and use, cover cropping and tillage systems are already in place. West Virginia is well under way to reaching Watershed Implementation Plan benchmarks, in some instances surpassing current goals.

However…

There are more opportunities. There is more work to do. Which is where signing onto the Bay agreement gets exciting: the stroke of a pen more than doubled the Chesapeake Bay Implementation Grant (CBIG) to West Virginia. This support from CBIG funding will jump 750,000 dollars, going from half a million to 1.25 million dollars. This will increase the number of Best Management Practices on the ground, giving landowners and producers what they need to do so. Our state agencies, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) and the West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA), will be providing assistance to implement additional practices.

One other program is going to be developed and set into action: the verification of these practices. The Bay Partnership is implementing record keeping standards of what Best Management Practices are in place and functioning in the watershed. The WVDA, under direction of Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick, will be planning its own style of this. Producers and landowners can volunteer for this assessment which will credit practices already in place or aid in advising on new opportunities.

In Commissioner Helmick’s own words: "I want to recognize the commitment and hard work West Virginia's agricultural community has put into protecting local waters over the past several years as they have spent incredible amounts of their own money to voluntarily accomplish all that has been asked of them. I ask farmers to stay the course and continue implementation of Best Management Practices on agricultural lands."

It has taken awhile to get where we are, even as we continue to strive for the goals on our horizon. The effects will testify to West Virginia’s commitment to conservation practices, improving resources, and higher water quality in its communities, as well those of downstream neighbors. Let’s move conservation forward!