Eastern Shore Collaborative Initiative

Second Meeting
4H & Extension Office, Denton, Maryland
Thursday, April 17, 2008

Welcome and Purpose

Joanne Throwe, from the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center, welcomed participants and noted that this meeting would build on the work of the first organizational meeting held in February. Her hopes for this meeting was to review the goals developed at the first meeting, refine and fine-tune them, and by the end of the meeting develop potential projects or directions that the group would be eager to pursue. She introduced Tanya Denckla Cobb, from the University of Virginia, who would facilitate the meeting. (*For a summary of the emerging structure for the collaborative, see Appendix 1.)*

Goals for a Collaborative

Tanya reviewed the six big goals that had emerged from the February meeting, and asked several questions: Are there questions about these goals? Are there ideas for other goals not already represented? Are there other ideas for refining these goals?

"Big Goals" from February '08 meeting
Participants hope that a collaborative would –

- Save agriculture, forestry, and working landscapes (keep farmers farming)
- Lead to clear identification of common problems.
- Set short and long-term goals for action.
- Focus on sustainability and profitability, with shore-wide impact.
- Develop common sense, realistic solutions.
- Lead to real, tangible results and change.

During the discussion of these goals, one participant expressed concern that Chesapeake Bay water quality is not explicitly mentioned in the goals/ hopes. Another participant noted that the overarching goal adopted at the February meeting appeared at the bottom of page 7 of the meeting summary, and should be highlighted as the group's overarching goal.

Overarching Goal: improving water quality while promoting economically viable agriculture.

One participant noted that the situation on the Eastern Shore is quite different from that in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley in that there is no excess manure. On the Eastern Shore it would not make sense to pursue energy projects (e.g., burning manure), because the farmers need and use all the manure in their pasture land. Later in the meeting, another perspective was offered that there is evidence of excess manure.

Another participant expressed concern about the possible shift toward producing corn for biofuel, and the potential negative consequence of an increase in nutrient runoff. Everyone should be alert to the potential that some solutions will bring unintended negative consequences. Another participant agreed, noting that the Eastern Shore has a robust chicken industry that should be protected; corn production is and should remain aimed at supplying feed for chickens, he said, not be aimed at ethanol production.

Tanya next reviewed the potential benefits and concerns identified by February participants associated with participating in a collaborative. Participants had no additions or changes to suggest to the benefits or concerns.

Next the group reviewed the list of specific goals and activities developed at the February meeting. Several suggestions were made:

1) *change* the goal heading of "Deposition of Manure" to "Utilization of Manure";

2) *add* diversification of incomes: several participants thought it might be wise to add this as another goal, specifically referring to the Vision for Ag program for Talbot County, which focuses on diversification of agriculture enterprises to strengthen the resilience of the county's agricultural base. Currently, 86% of Talbot's agricultural base is in grain (http://ces.washcoll.edu/ruralcommunityleadership_avp.php). There was some question as to whether the collaborative should be focusing on agricultural diversification as opposed to improving water quality. Suzy Friedman, co-chair of the Virginia Waste Solutions Forum (WSF), explained that the WSF twin goals are improving water quality and economic viability of agriculture. These goals have spawned numerous different projects, but all of the projects must somehow relate directly back to both twin goals of water quality and agricultural viability.

Geographic Focus: After some discussion the group agreed that the collaborative should initially focus on the Delmarva Peninsula or everything south of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. Participants from Delaware and Virginia may determine their own level of interest and participation, but should at least be invited.

Location of Meetings: Participants discussed a location for meetings that would make sense for growers all over the Peninsula. They agreed that the current location in Denton was convenient, and that another mid-Peninsula option with high-tech facilities would be Georgetown, Delaware.

Development of Specific Goals and Projects: Tanya asked the group to focus on what specific goals or projects might be appropriate for the collaborative to pursue over the next one to two years. If the collaborative can accomplish something concrete, or have some "easy wins," this will help keep the group energized and also attract funding for more long-term projects.

The following are participant ideas and concerns, organized according to goal (not according to actual sequence of discussion). The goals are not presented in any particular order.

1. **Establish and Understand the Baseline:** Continuing the discussion from the first meeting about this goal, participants talked about what kinds of data are needed to better understand current conditions.

    a. **Water quality data:** Whose water quality numbers should be used? USGS, EPA, others? Maryland's water quality data is updated every two years, and includes biological data, TMDL (total maximum daily load) information on pollutants, as well

as information on whether the Nitrogen source is organic or inorganic. This information could be helpful to the Collaborative.

A caution was expressed about sources of data: it's important to understand the basis for the data. Is it better to work with monitoring data or modeling data? On the Choptank, for example, there are only two to three monitoring stations, one of which is broken. Decisions shouldn't be based on so few data points in a watershed.

On participant suggested that both kinds of data are important. Modeling data allows us to understand contributions of individual sources, while monitoring provides specific location data.

Another participant noted that, for the Collaborative's work in its first one to two years, the Chesapeake Bay water quality monitoring data may be the most appropriate to use. The Maryland Mid-Atlantic Regional Water Quality Program (MAWQP) is working hard to add Best Management Practices (BMPs) into its modeling program, so, overall, this may represent the best data for the short-term.

There can be a 20 to 30 year lag period for nutrients to be reach the water; in some instances, nutrient delivery is shorter, on the order of 5 years or less, so the Collaborative cannot expect immediate answers about nutrient loads from research studies.

Participants generally agreed that in the short-term, the collaborative should use modeling data while in the longer term it should use monitoring data.

b. **Quantities of Manure and Crop Uptake:** A number of participants also expressed frustration with a focus on data, noting that people have been debating the data for years. If the group spends too much time debating between models and monitoring, or sets of data, it will lose interest and participation of some members. In Virginia, the Forum simply agreed that water quality degradation *is* occurring, and then moved on to a discussion of how to fix it.

Some suggested that the collaborative should narrow its focus to work on something specific, such as utilization of manure. This idea found significant support. Specifically, one participant suggested the group should try to determine how much manure is actually being produced, and what is actually being utilized by crops. This data could help improve transportation of manure.

One participant shared that the University of Maryland and Delaware are currently researching production, to establish more accurate numbers of how much is being produced. Available data is old, dating to 1992, and research will take at least one year to update these numbers.

Joanne Throwe announced a new website to facilitate trading of manure and other agricultural products: www.agtrader.org. Her hope is that this website – which operates like an agricultural "Craig's List" – will help farmers buy, sell, and trade what they need to be effective and profitable. It is designed to help farmers keep costs down and build sustainable markets for "Maryland Best" products. It also works well with the Maryland manure matching service.

2. ***Utilization of Manure:*** Participants generally agreed that utilization of manure could be a good focus for the collaborative. Some participants suggested that there is an excess of manure, while others suggested that there is not enough manure to meet the demand, pointing

to the fact that every agricultural reporting agency says there is no excess. Others responded by saying that, for a variety of reasons, farmers are not able to be forthright about their manure reporting. This is an issue that some expressed interest in learning more about, so that the group might be able to decide how to address it.

a. Covering manure piles: One issue is that manure, once it leaves the poultry farm to be applied on farm grain fields, becomes unregulated. Questions raised led to clarification that uncovered manure piles are a problem because there is evidence of discharge, leading to enforcement actions currently in process.

b. Awards program: One person suggested that there be an award for the "Best Manure Pile on the Shore," which offered light humor among the group but also led to serious consideration of the merits of some kind of award program. Another noted that Tyson offers an environmental stewardship award, but farmers are reluctant to apply for it because it invites closer regulatory scrutiny. Another person suggested that simple signage –recognizing BMPs or other practices – could go a long way toward educating consumers, the media, and general public about current farming practices.

c. Manure storage: The University of Maryland is currently researching lower cost systems for field storage of manure. Once these systems are developed, farmers will be assisted in implementation through a cost-share program.

d. ***Manure content:*** Manure today has far less phosphorous than it did five years ago, and this is not yet reflected in discussions of how to utilize manure. While NMPs are now P-based, the level of phosphorous in manure has been cut in half since 1998. Because this implies that *more* manure can now be spread, as P levels decline, there may be a need to further tighten the restrictions on P-based NMPs to prevent the unintended consequence of more nitrogen being spread on fields than desired.

e. Transportation of manure: There may be something the collaborative could do to help improve the efficiency or cost-effectiveness of manure transport. People expressed interest in learning more about the current transport program.

f. Chesapeake Bay Program: The Chesapeake Bay Program's Agricultural Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Workgroup met in December of 2007 and discussed the issue of poultry litter nutrients in the Bay watershed. The Maryland representative briefly outlined Maryland's manure transport program and other poultry litter-related policies. Meeting minutes are available upon request.

g. Manure market: Though we may not have much excess manure litter in the watershed now due to the high cost of commercial fertilizer, that does not mean that demand will remain as high in the future.

3. ***Education:*** The collaborative could have a powerful impact by simply getting information out to different audiences. Participants discussed several ways the collaborative could make a difference through education.

a. ***Farmer education:***

i. Correct methods of covering manure piles could be important. Nutrient Management Program (NMP) compliance could be the easiest low-hanging fruit.

ii. Farmer recognition for meeting benchmarks could be an important tool for raising public awareness, as well as providing incentives for excellence.

iii. There is a lot of research that is simply not reaching the farmers. Perhaps the collaborative can be useful in providing workshops or other methods of transferring this knowledge to farmers.

iv. There is also a gap in understanding the economic effectiveness of farming practices, and perhaps the collaborative could assist with establishing some mechanism for on-farm evaluation of different practices. In Iowa, for example, soy growers are trying to examine economic viability of their practices. So if a new fungicide is purported to do *xyz*, the farmers evaluate it for themselves in a cost-effective manner, and provide the results to other farmers, etc. The idea here is to establish an "on-farm network." The group expressed interest in learning more about the Iowa evaluation project. The website for the Iowa On-Farm Network is http://www.isafarmnet.com/.

Another participant noted that AgVenture is trying to evaluate management approaches with "High Q," and has accumulated 10 years of data on over 130,000 acres of farmland. A farmer noted that he gets helpful advice on good practices from poultry and AgVenture.

b. ***Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Assessment and Certification Program:*** The MD Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) is trying to establish a farmer certification program, to recognize farmers for a combination of NMP compliance, as well as soil and water conservation. This effort would raise the bar for nutrient trading and conservation programs. MASCD is seeking a grant for $500K over three years to design and launch this certification program, which will need a 50% match. Participants expressed interest in supporting this idea, and suggested that this could be a specific project supported by the collaborative. The group requested a presentation on this at the next meeting, so that it can determine how best to help move this project forward.

c. ***Citizen education:*** General understanding of agriculture is lacking, so perhaps general education of the public about what farmers are actually doing and costs of farming, would be important. Much like citizens can be trained to identify and report straight pipe discharges, it could be possible to train citizens to identify and report violations of Nutrient Management Program (NMP) compliance. Farmers who are not in compliance make everyone else look bad, and it would be helpful to enlist the public in applying pressure on "bad actors."

d. ***Media education:*** The media are powerful in influencing public opinion, so perhaps it would be important for the collaborative to find a way to educate the media.

4. Land Use: Some participants asked how the collaborative can help preserve land uses for farming, and keep farmers farming. One participant suggested that the collaborative could work with county governments on comprehensive plans, to help them develop land use and economic development policies to preserve agriculture. Kent County, for example, has an explicit farm preservation plan; perhaps the collaborative could help other counties develop similar plans. The Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) is one policy that might be helpful. Jennifer Dindinger shared that two research projects on TDRs are underway in the

upper shore counties to determine whether they are effective. Another participant noted that such an effort should include municipalities, too, as their policies of growth affect the surrounding counties.

Next Steps

The group decided that it would meet quarterly, with longer meeting time from 9am to 3pm to enable presentations and discussion. Joanne Throwe will establish a listserve to facilitate ease of discussion and announcements among the group.

Goals for the next meeting are to:

- Gain information on topics that offer promise for specific projects: Decide what water quality data sets to use as the "baseline" for measuring improvement, and/or simply agree that there is water quality degradation that needs to be addressed;
- Identify, if possible, specific projects that the collaborative will move forward;
- Establish a name for the collaborative (or at least begin floating ideas).

The following specific presentations were suggested by participants; Joanne Throwe will try to arrange presentations on these topics.

1. Water quality data: a snapshot of most recent data, river by river - *Hank Zygmunt and Kenny Bounds*
2. MD manure transportation program: *are there ways to improve this? - Possible speakers: Perdue Agricycle, Norm Astle (MDA) and Steve Hollenbeck (DDA)*
3. UMD and University of Delaware proposal for research to obtain accurate data on litter production. *Proposal will be circulated electronically, with possible presentations by the Harry Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Jennifer Timmons, and Bud Malone*
4. Proposal for the Agriculture Environmental Stewardship Certification: *Proposal will be circulated in advance, with a presentation by Lynne Hoot*
5. Evaluation of on-farm practices
    a. (Iowa Example): *information will be circulated in advance, with presentation by Suzy Friedman*
    b. AgVenture software program HIGHQ: *Robert Willard*

Possible issues for later meetings:

- Impacts of declining P-levels in manure – Scientists at Harry Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology

APPENDIX 1

Eastern Shore Collaborative Initiative
Emerging Structure and Focus

Eastern Shore Collaborative	Official name to be determined
Geographic Scope	Delmarva Peninsula, south of the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal
Overarching Goal	Improving water quality and economic viability of agriculture
Structure	Meet quarterly, from 9-3, in a central location (Denton, MD or Georgetown, DE)
Principles of Operation	1) an open, transparent process; 2) balanced representation of different interests; and 3) continuity in representation
Specific Goals	
Establish and Understand the Baseline	Learn most recent water quality data: levels and sources of nutrients; decide which data set(s) to use; or bypass this decision by simply agreeing that there is water quality degradation and moving on to the issue of how to fix it.
	Learn about manure transportation program: can the collaborative do something to make it more effective?
Utilization of Manure	Share available data on manure utilization
	Share information on impacts of lowering P in manure
Farmer and Public Education	Ag Env Stewardship Certification: share proposal
	Evaluation programs for farmer practices: share information on Iowa evaluation program and others
	Consider other awards or education programs: PSAs to show what are right and wrong farming practices
	Strategies to bring last 3% into compliance: education about manure piles; manure pile award;
	Bring latest research to farmers
Land Use	Consider working with local governments to change their comp plans to specifically address farm preservation through specific programs and zoning
Research and Development and Market Opportunities	
Diversification of Income Streams (on and off farms)	
Technical Resources	
Building Trust	

APPENDIX 2
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

28 People Participated

Academic	Wayne	Bell	Center for the Environment and Society, Washington College
Academic	Tanya	Denckla Cobb	Institute for Environmental Negotiation
Academic	Jennifer	Dindinger	Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc.
Academic	Jim	Lewis	Caroline County Extension
Academic	Jennifer	Timmons	Maryland Cooperative Extension-Lower Eastern Shore
Ag Org	Kenny	Bounds	MidAtlantic Farm Credit LEAD Maryland Foundation
Ag Org	Mark	Fuchs	Southern States Cooperative, Inc.
Ag Org	Kurt	Fuchs	Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.
Ag Org	L. Edward (Eddie)	Jestice, Jr.	Delaware Farm Bureau and farmer
Ag Org	Pat	Langenfelder	Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.
Agribusiness	Doug	Baxter	Tyson Foods, Inc.
Agribusiness	Tom	Brinson	Allen Family Foods, Inc.
Agribusiness	Bill	Massey	Mountaire Farms
Agribusiness	Beth	Sise	Mountaire Farms
Agribusiness	Jeff	Smith	Perdue Farms Incorporated
Agribusiness	Robert	Willard	Delaware/Maryland Agribusiness Association
Env	Jamie	Baxter	Chesapeake Bay Trust
Env	Suzy	Friedman	Center for Conservation Incentives at Environmental Defense
Env	John	Groutt	Wicomico Environmental Trust
Env	E.B.	James	Nanticoke Watershed Alliance
Env	Eileen	McClellan	Environmental Defense
Env	Elizabeth	Skane	University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center
Env	Joanne	Throwe	University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center
Fed	Hank	Zygmunt	EPA Region 3

Producer	Lee	Richardson	Farmer
State	Carrie	Decker	Maryland Department of Natural Resources
State	Lynne	Hoot	Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts
State	Rebecca (Becky)	Thur	Chesapeake Research Consortium