



November 17, 2016

Madhu Malhotra
Manager
Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Climate Change and Environmental Policy Division
Land and Water Policy Branch
135 St. Clair Avenue West, Floor 6
Toronto, Ontario M4V 1P5

Dear Ms. Malhotra,

Re: EBR Registry Number 012-8760: Reducing Phosphorus to Minimize Algal Blooms in Lake Erie

The Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) proposal on *Reducing Phosphorus to Minimize Algal Blooms in Lake Erie*. BFO represents the 19,000 beef producers across Ontario by advocating in the areas of policy planning, industry development and research, and domestic and export market development.

BFO is a member of Grow Ontario Together (GOT), a collaboration of agriculture organizations working together to provide leadership on the phosphorus problem facing Lake Erie, and we are committed to being part of the solution. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate and reinforce GOT's key messages, and provide additional comments specific to nutrient management in the beef industry.

BFO believes that the phosphorus reduction framework should be based on four key principles:

1. Build on the scientific monitoring and research undertaken to date in order to set realistic intermediate goals for reducing phosphorus, using the best scientific information currently available to predict and mitigate the environmental impacts of all pollution sources.
2. Set short- and long-term goals that target reductions from all sources, proportional to their contribution.
3. Consider the relative costs and benefits of the phosphorus reduction options, and the investment and contribution needed by those responsible for source reductions.
4. Continuously improve and adapt – as science advances, necessary actions will become more stringent and specific.

Building on these four principles, Ontario's Domestic Action Plan (DAP) should set an overall target and seek to achieve that target with specific activities based on contributions and effectiveness toward achieving the outcome. The following six strategies, as outlined in GOT's recently submitted comment paper and with additional comments from BFO regarding nutrient management in *4. Agriculture Source-Specific Actions*, should be incorporated into a comprehensive plan.

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1. Adaptive Management

Adaptive management means continuously improving a series of actions over time – learning from the outcomes of past actions and decisions, adjusting our course where it makes sense, and continuing to move forward.

2. Watershed Approach

In order for an approach to be meaningful, its proposed solutions must correspond to the realities of individual sub-watersheds, which can vary significantly in terms of their land use, population density and production practices. Ontario's DAP should utilize a watershed approach to manage the phosphorus load in Lake Erie by looking at problems and pursuing solutions across the entire watershed. Under this approach, the Province and its partners would develop sub-watershed phosphorus loading targets that add up to the overall DAP target.

3. Stewardship and Community Action

Ontario's DAP should recognize education and public engagement as essential ways to promote community-based stewardship and address phosphorus loading. Voluntary stewardship through education, community engagement and cost-share incentives, when possible, helps foster an improved understanding of the shared responsibility for environmental protection. Promoting collective, cumulative actions and behavioral changes can help reduce phosphorus loading over the long term.

4. Agriculture Source-Specific Actions

Ontario's DAP should recognize the role of agriculture, while acknowledging that we are not starting from scratch – we are building on existing successful initiatives. Voluntary participation in agricultural and rural stewardship programs has a long history of success because they combine education with incentives to adopt best management practices, resulting in changes in land management that provide sustained environmental benefits over time.

The beef industry recognizes that manure application on frozen and snow-covered ground leads to a high risk of phosphorus run-off, and this activity warrants appropriate management. The good news is that Ontario's *Nutrient Management Act (NMA)* addresses this activity and our current NMA regulatory standard is technically sound. It is, in fact, very similar to the Ohio Senate Bill #1 standard. The restrictions are risk based and outcome focused, with determining factors based on soil conditions and proper application methods rather than a rigid timeframe. The existing strength of Ontario's NMA technical standards, particularly for land application of manure on frozen and snow-covered ground, should provide the basis on which the DAP addresses nutrient management.

Regarding nutrient management, policies to reduce application of manure on frozen and snow-covered ground should not be limited to regulation only. Education, outreach and promotion of existing industry best practices are opportunities to effectively promote the NMA regulatory standard and encourage proper timing of manure application. There is also potential for developing protocols for responding to complaints of manure application on frozen and snow-covered ground. Coordinated information, advocacy and education will help ensure awareness and implementation of best practices.



Ensuring responsible nutrient management should also involve the following:

- Support for capacity building, such as a government grant for manure storage, to ensure farms have sufficient storage (240 days minimum) to hold their nutrients over the non-growing season.
- Review of the current Nutrient Management Strategy and Nutrient Management Plan documentation, training and certification requirements in order to examine possible opportunities to streamline the process, improve the business utility of data generated through nutrient planning, and make the requirements proportionate to the farm size and risk being addressed. This will help ensure that small farms are not unduly burdened by red tape.
- Solutions to improve the market mobility of nutrients, enabling the movement of nutrients from geographic areas of high supply (e.g. intense livestock) to areas with fewer self-generated nutrients, effectively leveraging the soil health potential of manure as nutrient sources for Ontario's cropland.

Best practices for nutrient management should be supported and promoted province-wide. However, any potential regulatory action that is targeted in a geographic area like the Lake Erie watershed should be offset by support and funding to those affected, to ensure that agricultural production doesn't leave the targeted area, and to maintain balance with other regions in Ontario that may not face the same level of regulation.

5. Monitoring and Compliance

Long-term monitoring is a critical part of the overall effort to restore the health of Lake Erie. An integrated monitoring network across all jurisdictions in the Lake Erie basin will be necessary to assess progress towards the adopted targets, and also to provide sufficient information to support an adaptive management approach. Establishing an accurate baseline will be key to achieving measurable progress.

The DAP should recognize that numerous agencies, provincial ministries and local municipalities already have strong legislative and regulatory frameworks in place to mitigate phosphorus loading in Lake Erie. To achieve the DAP reduction objectives, compliance with the existing regulations and controls that are now in place will be critical.

6. Research, Modeling and Innovation

Ongoing collaborative research will be a key component of achieving targets for phosphorus reduction. This work will build on past and current research and monitoring programs. It will also help to identify emerging issues in the watershed, while supporting the adaptive management approach adopted in the DAP. Modeling and analysis will also play a significant role in the adaptive management process, and research into innovative technologies and solutions will explore ways to address current problems, as well as any new problems that may come to light.

In summary, BFO is confident that the ecological health of the Great Lakes can be protected and restored through continued stewardship efforts, targeted research, new and innovative technology for wastewater and storm water management, and a commitment to managing the watershed and its resources in a sustainable manner.



The Beef Farmers of Ontario would like to thank the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposal for *Reducing Phosphorus to Minimize Algal Blooms in Lake Erie*. We would be pleased to answer any questions on the comments contained in this document, and we look forward to participating in further consultations on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Bowman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and "B".

Matt Bowman
President

cc: BFO Board of Directors

