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Illinois strategy showcases collaborative efforts to reduce nutrient loads to Illinois rivers and streams

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<https://www.riverbender.com/articles/details/illinois-strategy-showcases-collaborative-efforts-to-reduce-nutrient-loads-to-illinois-rivers-and-streams-23065.cfm>



DECATUR - As part of the state's on-going commitment to reduce nutrient losses, the directors of the Illinois Department of Agriculture and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency announced today the release of the state's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Biennial Report. This document, unveiled at the 2017 Farm Progress Show in Decatur, IL, describes actions taken in Illinois during the last two years to reduce nutrient losses and influence positive changes in nutrient loads over time.

Illinois' Strategy is one of numerous other state strategies developed and implemented over the 31-state Mississippi River basin, intended to improve our nation's water quality. Illinois' Strategy provides a framework for reducing both point and non-point nutrient losses to improve our state's overall water quality, as well as the quality of water leaving the state and making its way down the Mississippi River into the Gulf of Mexico.

“Illinois agriculture has a positive story to tell,” said Department of Agriculture Director Raymond Poe. “We have seen a significant increase in the adoption of various best management practices. Our partners and stakeholders have done a tremendous job getting the word out about what we are doing in Illinois with the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. Farmers understand the consequences of nutrient loss, and they support our quest to minimize losses.”

“In just two years, we are already seeing the impacts of Illinois’ Strategy on water quality,” said Illinois EPA Director Alec Messina. “The collaborative efforts of our stakeholders are resulting in real improvements in Illinois’ waters and we look forward to future improvements that will be gained as additional practices are implemented.”

The biennial report contains an update to the original science assessment including nutrient load data from 2011-2015 for both point and non-point sources as well as sector by sector reports on activities conducted during the last two years targeted at nutrient loss reduction.

The report also contains information from a recent survey conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA-NASS) as well as other data from other existing sources to serve as metrics by which progress towards overall water quality improvements can be measured now and in the future.

The Agriculture Water Quality Partnership Forum (AWQPF) reports that the agriculture sector invested more than \$54 million in nutrient loss reduction for research, outreach, implementation and monitoring. These contributions have come from AWQPF members and other organizations that are working towards reaching the goals set forth in the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs). Because of the proactive measures of the various agriculture groups, Illinois farmers have become broadly aware of a variety of strategies that mitigate nutrient loss through the adoption of best management practices. Highlights include a move toward split spring/fall nitrogen applications and an increase number of acres dedicated to conservation practices such as a use of cover crops.

Over the course of the last two years since the release of the strategy, significant strides have also been made in limiting the amount of phosphorus discharge from wastewater treatment plants in Illinois. In the last year, point source sector members targeted key decision makers and practitioners to spread the message of nutrient loss reduction through regulatory updates as part of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program. As of 2016, nearly 80-percent of all effluent from wastewater treatment plants in Illinois is regulated under a NPDES permit that includes a total phosphorus limit. This number will continue to grow as existing permits expire or come up for renewal. To demonstrate the commitment toward nutrient removal, waste water treatment facilities report spending \$144.96 million to fund feasibility studies, optimization studies and capital investment.

The Illinois EPA, through its State Revolving Fund program, provides low interest rate loans to point source projects addressing water quality issues, including nutrient pollution. Last year, Illinois EPA provided/granted \$640,599,148 dollars to these projects. Illinois EPA also provides funding for nonpoint source projects designed to achieve nutrients reduction. Annually this program provides 3.5 million dollars to nonpoint source projects.

This biennial report will be updated again in 2019. The science, monitoring and activity from each sector will be updated to demonstrate Illinois' continued commitment to nutrient loss reduction.

“There is a lot more work that needs to be done,” said Warren Goetsch, IDOA Deputy Director. “However, in releasing this report at the Farm Progress Show, we are introducing these successes to farmers who may be somewhat apprehensive about trying new management practices. Increasing the exposure of our message will keep this effort in front of producers so we can continue to make progress in the years to come.”