



Pennsylvania Conservation Assessment Initiative Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the EPA doing this PA Conservation Assessment Initiative?

The goal of these assessments is to identify, assess, and address significant pollution discharges to help PA meet its water quality goals for local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

What Is EPA looking for during the assessments?

EPA is assessing farms that have the potential to contribute significant amounts of nutrients and sediment to local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

What is EPA's regulatory authority to conduct these assessments?

The Clean Water Act Sections 308 and 402 and their implementing regulations (40 C.F.R. 122.23) provide the authority for EPA to conduct these assessments. EPA has similar authority to evaluate municipal stormwater discharges not otherwise regulated under the Clean Water Act and regulations (40 C.F.R. 122.26(a)(9)).

How many assessments will be conducted in Lancaster County?

EPA plans to conduct approximately five assessments in April and May.

How were farms selected?

EPA is following available data to select farms for assessment. Criteria include location, proximity to impaired waters, potential downstream impacts, and potential impacts on drinking water. These farms will be small or medium operations that currently are not covered under the federal CAFO permitting program.

Will farmers be notified in advance of the visits?

Yes, EPA will give the farmers advanced notice of the assessments. EPA is coordinating with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the State Conservation Commission, and the Lancaster County Conservation District.

What will happen if the operation is contributing to water quality issues? Will EPA designate small farms as CAFOs?

If EPA finds water quality issues, we will work with the state and local partners to connect them with funding opportunities and technical assistance to address the water quality issues. If the operation is a significant contributor of pollutants to the local stream and impacts downstream waters and does not take steps to mitigate its discharge, EPA has the authority to designate the farm as a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) and require them to get a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit.

How will the assessment data results be shared and used?

EPA Region 3 will share reports of our findings with the farmer and state agencies and will post on our [website](#) a summary of our activities, from which any personally identifiable information is removed in accordance with federal law.

Will a local representative be available as a landowner advocate?

Yes, an agricultural technician from the Lancaster County Conservation District will be on site to answer questions during the assessment.

What resources will be available if any corrective actions are required?

Depending on the issue, a variety of technical services and financial resources may be available to the landowner such as Pennsylvania's Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program and Conservation Excellence Grant program.

What happens if a farmer does not correct the water quality issues?

If the operation is a significant contributor of pollutants to the local stream and impacts downstream waters and does not take steps to mitigate its discharge, EPA has the authority to designate the farm as a CAFO and require them to get a NPDES permit.

How much time will be available to the landowner to correct any issues?

There is no specific timeframe required as we realize making significant changes can take time. The expectation however is that issues should be corrected as quickly as possible. The Lancaster County Conservation District and other State and local partners can prioritize the farm for the necessary technical and financial resources to address the issues.

What is the long-term benefit for the landowner and community as a result of the assessments?

Many farm families are doing what is right to help protect the environment and their neighbors downstream. This initiative will help identify those operations with water quality issues and connect them with funding opportunities and technical assistance to address the issues. Everyone benefits when our local waters are cleaner. Farmers' conservation actions not only improve the quality of local streams, but also the quality of waters downstream like the Chesapeake Bay. Operations that are well-managed and compliant with environmental regulations are more sustainable.