

NEW REPORT: DESPITE PHOSPHORUS POLLUTION OVERLOAD, MARYLAND CUT WATER QUALITY MONITORING AND ALLOWS POULTRY EXPANSION

*Environmental groups call on state to restore funding for monitoring
and consider moratorium on construction of new poultry houses*

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Washington, D.C. -- Despite the continued over-application of poultry manure to Eastern Shore farm fields, Maryland dramatically cut back water quality monitoring while the industry continues to expand, according to a new report by the Environmental Integrity Project.

The growth of the poultry industry makes it harder to understand why Maryland last year eliminated almost 60 percent (9 of 16) of its water quality monitoring sites that measured phosphorus pollution in rivers that run through the center of the poultry industry and into the Chesapeake Bay.

“It is penny-wise and pound foolish to stop monitoring Eastern Shore streams for nutrients while phosphorus builds up in the watershed and the industry keeps building new poultry houses,” said Eric Schaeffer, executive director of the Environmental Integrity Project and former director of civil enforcement at the Environmental Protection Agency. “We need to monitor water quality to find out whether efforts to keep the poultry industry’s pollution out of the Chesapeake Bay are actually working.”

At least 200 new poultry houses are permitted for construction on the Delmarva peninsula, including 67 to 70 in Somerset County, Maryland. This growth threatens to undermine any progress the state might achieve through its June 2015 manure management regulations, called the Phosphorus Management Tool (or PMT).

The Environmental Integrity Project and allied organizations – including the Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition, the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Health’s Center for a Livable Future, Food & Water Watch, Waterkeepers Chesapeake, the Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy, and Assateague Coastkeeper – call on Maryland to consider a moratorium on the permitting or construction of new poultry houses until the PMT is fully implemented in 2024 and the phosphorus overload problem is under control.

“The high concentration of poultry waste on the Eastern Shore damages the ecosystem on which human health depends and exposes the people of the region to antibiotic resistant bacteria present in the waste or carried into homes by wind and flies,” said Dr. Robert Lawrence, founder of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health’s Center for a Livable Future. “Continued expansion of the poultry industry will increase these threats to human health and should be stopped.”

The groups also call on the state and federal governments to immediately restore funding for water quality monitoring on the Eastern Shore, which is needed to determine if the PMT is working to reduce runoff from agriculture, the largest single source of pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

“The rural communities of the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia could be dramatically altered if hundreds of additional mega-sized poultry houses are allowed,” said Betsy Nicholas, Executive Director of Waterkeepers Chesapeake. “We should place a moratorium on the construction of these facilities before our air, water and local economies are assaulted by these under-regulated businesses, many of which are owned by out-of-state interests.”

The new Environmental Integrity Project report, titled “More Phosphorus, Less Monitoring,” indicates that nearly 80 percent of the phosphorus in manure spread on cropland by Maryland poultry operations was applied to soils that already have too much phosphorus, based on the Maryland Department of Agriculture’s criteria. And almost all of the manure “exported” to other farms stays within the Eastern Shore.

The data was obtained from state records called “Annual Implementation Reports” that were filed by Maryland poultry operations in 2013, the latest year for which data is available. The reports detail the amount of phosphorus in poultry litter that large poultry operations applied to crops on their land, and how much is needed for plant growth.

An Environmental Integrity Project analysis of the 2013 annual reports filed by 498 poultry operations that raised nearly 277 million broilers revealed that:

- Ninety three poultry operations spread poultry litter containing 886,158 pounds of phosphorus to more than 18,000 acres. Seventy nine percent of that phosphorus was spread on soils that already contained well beyond the amount needed for crop growth, based on soil phosphorus concentrations.
- Twenty-six poultry operations spread 6 percent of the total phosphorus to 1,312 acres of cropland where phosphorus levels are so high that application of more phosphorus is now banned by new state regulations.
- Three hundred and sixty-one poultry operations exported 215,349 tons of poultry litter containing over 5 million pounds of phosphorus to other destinations in 2013. Of the total phosphorus exported, 73 percent went to other farmers, largely on the Eastern Shore.

During a time when it was developing its new phosphorus management regulations, Maryland in December 2013 shut down 9 of its 16 long-term water quality monitoring stations on Eastern Shore waterways surrounded by the poultry industry, citing federal budget cuts from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Chesapeake Bay Program.

Among the monitoring stations eliminated all sites on the Transquaking River, and two out of three stations on the Pocomoke River, a site of toxic algal blooms and fish kills during the 1997 Pfiesteria crisis, which was linked to excessive poultry manure application by farms. Reduced monitoring will make it

much harder to determine whether the state's new efforts to limit runoff pollution with the Phosphorus Management Tool are working or need to be strengthened.

"The Environmental Integrity Project's report is further proof of a phosphorus overflow problem on the Eastern Shore made worse daily by a dramatic increase in the number of chickens and less monitoring," said Bob Gallagher, co-chair of the Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition. "Our coalition believes that a moratorium of animal feeding operations is necessary to ensure we do not continue the egregious overflow of phosphorus pollution into our local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay at least until the Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT) is fully implemented."

The poultry industry is growing in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, with at least 200 poultry houses permitted for construction on the Delmarva peninsula. By July 2015, Somerset County permitted for construction 67 to 70 new chicken houses on 18 properties. Wicomico and Worcester counties have also experienced growth in the construction of poultry houses over the past several years.

Just south of Somerset County, Accomack County, Virginia, received 12 applications for an additional 84 new poultry houses between November 2014 and July 2015. Kent County, Delaware has gained 50 new poultry houses since 2014.

Kathy Phillips, Assateague Coastkeeper, said: "The level of industrialization of our rural areas due to the intensity and density of these large scale animal feeding operations prompted residents in Somerset County, in 2014, to ask for a moratorium on all new poultry operations while imploring their elected officials to protect the health and safety of their communities through zoning changes and adoption of health ordinances. The Environmental Integrity Project's report substantiates the concerns of these citizens that their rural communities are being industrialized without proper oversight, and a moratorium is needed until the situation can be brought under control."

Wenonah Hauter, Executive Director of Food & Water Watch, said: "We need more monitoring of factory farm pollution, not less. And it should include facility-specific monitoring requirements so that we can identify polluters. Ceasing to monitor pollution, and allowing unchecked expansion of factory farms, is the sort of deregulation that will benefit industry at the expense of public health, livelihoods, and a healthy bay."

Timothy D. Junkin, Director of the Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy, said: "The Environmental Integrity Project report on phosphorus overloads highlights a profound and worsening pollution problem in Maryland, and particularly on the Eastern Shore. New chicken houses should not be allowed until strict regulations are in place requiring new operators to dispose of their chicken waste in a way that does not add any phosphorus pollution to the Chesapeake or her tributaries."

MEDIA CONTACT:

Tom Pelton, Environmental Integrity Project, 202-888-2703 or tpelton@environmentalintegrity.org

ABOUT THE GROUPS:

The Environmental Integrity Project is a 13-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to holding polluters and governments accountable to protect public health.

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Center for a Livable Future partners with educators, researchers, policymakers, and communities to build a healthier, more equitable, and resilient food system

Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a coalition of nineteen independent programs working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable.

The Assateague Coastkeeper is an on-the-water advocate who patrols and protects the Maryland and Northern Virginia Eastern Shore coastal bays, standing up to polluters, and granting everyone's right to clean water.

Food & Water Watch champions healthy food and clean water for all. We stand up to corporations that put profits before people, and advocate for a democracy that improves people's lives and protects our environment.

Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy is a non-profit organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the waterways that comprise the Choptank River watershed, Eastern Bay, and the Miles and Wye Rivers.

The Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition works to improve Maryland waterways and protect public health by reducing pollution, and increasing transparency and accountability, from agriculture and other associated sources of water degradation. Its partners include: Anacostia Riverkeeper, Audubon Naturalist Society, Assateague Coastal Trust, Blue Water Baltimore, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, Clean Water Action, Environment Maryland, Environmental Integrity Project, Gunpowder Riverkeeper, League of Women Voters of Maryland, Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper, Maryland League of Conservation Voters, Maryland Pesticide Education Network, Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy, Potomac Riverkeeper, Sierra Club, Maryland Chapter, South River Federation, Waterkeepers Chesapeake, West/Rhode Riverkeeper.

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