

TOP CHESAPEAKE BAY LEGISLATION IN 2016 WOULD MAKE CHICKEN COMPANIES RESPONSIBLE FOR MANURE

Advocates say burden of excess manure disposal should not be on small farmers, taxpayers

(Annapolis, MD) A broad coalition of environmental groups is banding together during the 2016 Maryland General Assembly to support legislation requiring poultry companies to take responsibility for the manure their chickens produce. Excess manure can saturate farm fields and pollutes local creeks, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay if not handled properly. The legislation will seek to protect Maryland farmers and taxpayers from costs that should be borne by the large poultry companies.

“A responsible dog owner picks up after his or her dogs. Poultry companies must be responsible for cleaning up after their chickens,” said Alison Prost, Maryland Executive Director, Chesapeake Bay Foundation. “The big companies own the birds, and control almost all aspects of the chicken production process, but they bear no responsibility for any manure left behind. Ensuring the excess manure is managed properly will help improve the quality of the Bay and the eastern shore rivers.”

Legislation set to be introduced in the coming days will require poultry companies to remove and properly dispose of all poultry litter for which a chicken grower does not have state-approved plans.

“For far too long, massive corporations like Perdue have raked in profits by forcing farmers, residents and the Chesapeake Bay to bear the burden of pollution from millions of pounds of excess chicken waste each year. The Poultry Litter Management Act would help shift responsibility for the number one source of water pollution in Maryland back where it belongs — onto the big chicken companies,” said Michele Merkel, Co-director, Food & Water Justice. “Food & Water Watch is proud to stand with the bill’s sponsors and a growing coalition of organizations and residents in support of the Poultry Litter Management Act.”

“Making chicken companies responsible for their waste is a top priority for environmental groups this year,” said Karla Raettig, Executive Director, Maryland League of Conservation Voters and co-chair of the Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition. “Family farmers who grow chickens for these companies don’t have the money to cart the excess manure away. Neither do Maryland taxpayers.”

A recent U.S. Geological Service Water report found the rivers of the Eastern Shore have concentrations of phosphorus that are among the “highest in the nation” due to agricultural operations. The Maryland Department of Agriculture has estimated about 228,000 tons of excess manure are currently applied to crop fields in Maryland; this is likely to increase with the recent expansion of chicken houses. Manure makes good fertilizer, but too much manure applied over decades has left many Eastern Shore fields saturated with phosphorus. The phosphorus ends up in local creeks and rivers, causing dead zones of low oxygen, fish kills, restrictions on shell-fish harvesting, and swimming advisories.

The legislation would be the second step of a critical two-step plan to reduce phosphorus pollution from agriculture in Maryland. In 2015, the Hogan Administration enacted regulations forbidding farmers from over-applying poultry manure on fields. The 2016 legislation would place the cost of properly using, or disposing of that excess manure in the hands of the big companies, not small farmers or the public. Growers currently shoulder much of the responsibility, with considerable direct and indirect subsidies from taxpayers. Public dollars subsidize farmers who plant winter crops that soak up excess nutrients from soybean and corn fields. The cost to taxpayers is about \$20 million a year. In addition, taxpayers contribute to a program that transports some excess manure to safe areas. Those transportation costs are expected to rise significantly as farmers need to find a place for excess litter.

Agriculture is the single, largest source of pollution to the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland waterways. About 44 percent of the nitrogen and 57 percent of the phosphorus polluting the Bay comes from farms, and much of that comes from animal manure. But dollar for dollar, reducing pollution to the Chesapeake Bay from farms is far cheaper than reducing it from any other source: sewage plants, stormwater systems and septic systems. The issue is urgent. The amount of excess chicken manure in Maryland could soon be even greater. Large industrial farms are expanding – including [200 new poultry houses](#) now permitted for construction on the Delmarva Peninsula. This includes about 70 in Somerset County, with Wicomico and Worcester counties also experiencing [considerable new growth](#). This construction would mean [an additional 10 million chickens and about 20 million more pounds of manure](#) per year.

Big chicken companies have the necessary resources and the responsibility to help Maryland's manure overload problem. If poultry companies become responsible for their waste, that would ensure Maryland taxpayers, and farmers, no longer bear the sole burden of reducing pollution.

Groups supporting the legislation include: [Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#), [Food & Water Watch](#) and the Maryland Clean Agriculture Coalition ([Anacostia Riverkeeper](#), [Assateague Coastal Trust](#), [Audubon Naturalist Society](#), [Blue Water Baltimore](#), [Center for Progressive Reform](#), [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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