



Mister Chair, Madame Chair for the record my name is Doug Peterson, I serve as President of the Minnesota Farmers Union and I appreciate the opportunity to briefly share some priority issues of MFU and our members concerning water and this 2015 legislative session.

Our three biggest priorities for the year are a strong budget for agriculture programs, addressing property tax concerns, and addressing Ag education. However, MFU is following several pieces of legislation and that deal with water and tonight I'd like to address it this way:

When I left the legislature and became President of Farmers Union, MFU was involved in many legislative, state, and stakeholder processes and committees, but very few with water. Today I count as many as eight different groups MFU actively participates in, I would like to share these with you and some of the issues that come out of them that I think are useful.

Clean Water Council

As you know the Clean Water Council was created through the Clean Water Legacy Act which was signed into law June 2, 2006, which MFU participated in at the G-16 level. MFU is represented on the Council by our MilleLacs County Farmers Union President Bob Hoefert, and **MFU's primary goal is that the legislature strongly considers the funding proposals put forward by the Clean Water Council**, MFU is disappointed that Governor Dayton's budget omits many of the Council's recommendations. The Council's role is to advise on the administration and implementation of the Clean Water Legacy Act, including:

Minnesota Agricultural Water Resources Center (MAWRC)

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Resource Center is a non-profit research and education organization dedicated to assisting Minnesota farmers in addressing water quality concerns. Members and supporters include agricultural organizations such as MFU representing more than 50,000 farmers and those who advise them. MFU is represented on MAWRC by Yellow Medicine County Farmers Union President Tim Velde who was recently elected to be the Chair. Among the initiatives put forward by MAWRC are Discovery Farms Minnesota a farmer-led program combining water quality information and farming system information to help characterize the relationship between agricultural management and water quality. MFU urges the Council to consider having a presentation visiting a Discovery Farm to learn more about program.

Green Lands, Blue Water Coalition

For many years MFU has been part of the Green Lands Blue Waters initiative which is a consortium of scientists, policy experts, farmers, and community organizers embracing the Green Lands Blue Waters vision and implementing programs that directly advance the consortium's strategies and goals. The strength of Green Lands Blue Waters builds on the programs of the partner organizations and of their individual staff and faculty members. It's based on the concept of getting as much value as possible from farmlands by growing crops that keep the soil covered year-round: farming with Continuous Living Cover. The value comes in yields and profits; but also in reduced risk, improved soil health, more wildlife, and cleaner water. At issue here is reducing pollutants that end up in our

nation's waters. **MFU strongly supports legislation introduced this year, and that was funded last year known as the University of Minnesota "Forever Green" that is a perennial crop initiative authored by Sen. Kevin Dahle, our members want and need the information and help this initiative supports.**

Fertilizer Research and Promotion Council

MFU is represented on the AFREC Council by Chippewa County Farmer Dan Benson, the Council provides grants for research, education, and technology transfer projects related to agricultural fertilizer, soil amendments and plant amendments. AFREC began funding research and education in 2008. Current funding for the AFREC program is provided by fertilizer tonnage fees. This program acquires funds through a \$0.40 per ton fertilizer tonnage fee on all commercial agricultural fertilizer sold in Minnesota. AFREC is responsible for how all funds are spent. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture provides administrative support for the program. Among research projects are;

=Nitrate in Tile-Drain Water Relative to Time and Source of Nitrogen Application

=Minimizing Nitrate Loss to Drainage by Optimizing Nitrogen Rate and Timing for a Corn-Corn-Soybean Rotation

MFU urges the legislature to consider extending the sunset date of the Council which is currently 2017.

MN FarmWise

MFU President Peterson has participated on a committee for a program called MN FarmWise which is a community-based, farmer-to-farmer initiative designed to improve water quality by increasing the **voluntary** adoption of critical conservation practices that reduce flow, sediment and nutrient runoff in vulnerable areas of a Minnesota River subwatershed. **MFU would encourage the Clean Water Commission to look at recommendations in the Freshwater Society recent Report "Farm to Stream" which makes several recommendations on how improvements can be made to achieve improved conservation and water quality.**

Pesticide Management Plan Committee

The purpose of the Pesticide Management Plan Committee (PMPC) is to provide informed and diverse comment to the commissioner of agriculture for major water quality evaluation activities and decisions. MFU is represented on this committee by Benton County Farmer Mike Ratka.

Board of Water and Soil Resources Drainage Working Group

Started by the legislature many years ago, MFU has been an active member on this group being represented by MFU Gov't Director Thom Petersen and Todd County Farmer Al Perish. **MFU suggests that this group maybe a good group to look at some of the proposed buffer initiatives and make recommendations even perhaps for a future legislative session.**

Natural Resources Conservation Service State Tech Committee

This committee which meets randomly brings together state, federal and local authorities as well as farm groups, environmental groups and other interested parties to consider federal farm programs and the impacts and possibilities from the state and the impact on conservation. MFU has been an active participant.

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Advisory Committee

MFU President Doug Peterson has served on this committee since the signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding, which established the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, agreed to form an Advisory Committee to develop the program. The Committee's role was to provide diverse and substantive input in an advisory capacity to the Commissioner of Agriculture on the development and implementation of the program. Formal records are kept of meetings to record the input, concerns and recommendations of members. **MFU supports funding and continuation of this program.**

So again, as you can see Minnesota Farmers Union and Ag groups in general are very active in making sure Minnesota has a clean, safe, and abundant water supply by participating in many groups.

A few other issues to touch on related to water:

Governor Dayton Buffer strip proposal:

MFU is taking a wait and see attitude, the agencies are holding a meeting to update farm groups on Wednesday, Asst. Commissioner Wohlman participated in a conference call with our county leaders Friday to hear comments on proposal. In general MFU policy supports the current buffer law, and wants local enforcement. Questions MFU members have:

- What will be recommended for increase from current buffer law?
- Are their financial or cost share incentives available to offset my loss of income?
- When would new rules take place, 1 year, 5 years, 10 years?
- Which ditches would be covered? Private? Inlets?
- How would property law come into place for hunting on buffer land?
- Where is "line" measured from?
- How will enforcement work? What would penalties be?

Feedlot issues

MFU feels the current 7020 feedlot rules are working well, and sees no need to change them. MFU also supports the MPCA Citizens Board. MFU also feels permitting time as improved and does not see the need to change at this time.

Irrigation

More MFU members have begun to irrigate in recent years. MFU supports consistent and transparent process for our members with regard to irrigation permitting and the process. MFU supports a monitoring system that assures farmers and residents that adequate supply is available in aquifer to support irrigation.

Wetlands

MFU continues to discuss with legislators and administration officials how to improve process around wetland determinations, violations, and interagency as well as state-federal interactions work for farmers. Having to deal with multiple agencies when it comes to wetland issues is something we hear consistently from our members that could be improved.

Thank-you for your time, I'll be happy to stand for questions.

