

# 2022 Water Quality Status Report



**F**rom trends in soil tests that show marked improvement in water quality over the last 20 years, to the ongoing on-farm best practices research being done in northwest Ohio to help farmers find the best nutrient management solutions for them, water quality is always a literal work in progress for the Ohio Farm Bureau.

Signature water quality initiatives and partnerships such as the Blanchard River Demonstration Farms Network along with H2Ohio, and its farmer certification piece the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative, have been crafted and heavily supported with money and manpower by the organization.

However, further work is done quietly behind the scenes by OFBF staff and volunteers to help guide the state and region to a healthier H2O future. Ohio Farm Bureau members are represented on multiple advisory boards and committees by staff that ensure the voices of farmers, landowners and agriculturalists are heard.

# Grassroots Water Quality Solutions

***“Our policies are developed via a locally driven grassroots process and support the development of programs, policies and regulations that are scientifically sound, based on credible data, practical, realistic, economically feasible and whenever possible, delivered in a flexible and voluntary manner,” said Larry Antosch, Ohio Farm Bureau senior director of policy development and environmental policy. “By being actively engaged in these discussions, we have the opportunity to ensure that the realities of farming in today’s economic and environmental conditions are understood and considered and that the decisions being made are consistent with our policies.”***

Public Policy Water Quality Staff are representing the interests of OFBF members on several advisory boards, work groups and committees across the state and region. This boots-on-the-ground, behind-the-scenes work is critical to getting the message out to policymakers on a local, regional and national level about water quality efforts and the impact they are having.

Here are some of the areas the interests of Ohio Farm Bureau members are represented:

## **US EPA Region 5 Great Lakes Advisory Board**

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes Advisory Board is an EPA federal advisory committee established to provide



advice and recommendations on matters related to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the implementation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada.

## **Western Lake Erie Partnership Leadership Team**



The Western Lake Erie Partnership is a tri-state (Ohio, Michigan and Indiana) and

federal partnership dedicated to enhancing multi-purpose projects that improve land and water resource management in the Western Lake Erie Basin and promote a healthy, productive watershed.

## **Maumee Watershed Nutrient Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Stakeholder Group**

Stakeholders from all areas and interests in the Maumee River watershed have the opportunity to review draft reports and other information and provide recommendations and feedback to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.



## **Maumee Watershed Modeling Stakeholders Advisory Group**

An advisory group for a modeling project to analyze management scenarios and the impacts of conservation practices and climate change in the Maumee Watershed. This project maintains the same modeling groups from The Ohio State University and University of Michigan, with the addition of models from the University of Toledo and Central State University, and will be led by Ohio State. The project is funded by the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Harmful Algal Bloom Research Initiative (HABRI).

## **WLEB-OH 4R Program Advisory Committee**

The committee is composed of individuals from agri-businesses, state and federal agencies, research institutions, conservation organizations and private industries who possess a big-picture, forward thinking and solutions oriented attitude.



Responsible for creating the Ohio 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification program, the Advisory Committee meets regularly to review the current 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification program standards and certification criteria, makes suggestions for modification and provides recommendations to the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Council.

## **Ohio 4R Nutrient Stewardship Council**

The council advises the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification program for ag retailers. The 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program is a proactive, responsible commitment aimed at the long-term improvement of water quality. This Program encourages agricultural retailers, service providers and other certified professionals to adopt proven best practices through the 4Rs, which refers to using the Right Source of Nutrients at the Right Rate and Right

Time in the Right Place. This approach provides a science-based framework for plant nutrition management and sustained crop production, while considering specific individual farms' needs.

### Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) Sustaining Scioto Board

The Sustaining Scioto Board is a standing board of the Sustainability Advisory Committee which guides MORPC's and its working groups' activities in the area of economic and environmental sustainability.



### Sustaining Scioto Agricultural & Rural Communities Outreach Team

A workgroup of the Sustaining Scioto Board, the purpose of this team is to facilitate regional collaboration with agricultural stakeholders in the Upper Scioto Watershed, to share relevant data and resources, and to advance practices and programs that support improvements to surface water quality.

### USDA NRCS State Technical Committee

This committee serves in an advisory capacity to the Natural Resources Conser-



vation Service and other agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the implementation of the natural resources conservation provisions of Farm Bill legislation.

### Ohio Certified Crop Adviser Board

Provides oversight to the Ohio Certified Crop Adviser Program, approves continuing education credits for Certified Crop Advisors, reviews and modifies as necessary CCA test questions and recognizes outstanding performance by awarding the "CCA of the Year."



### Pilot Watershed Advisory Committee

The Ohio State University will be the lead partner on a new five-year, multi-million-dollar pilot watershed project in northwestern Ohio designed to demonstrate that agricultural conservation practices—if used on 70% of the farmland in a watershed, and evaluated on a watershed scale—can help meet Lake Erie's water quality goals.

### Ohio Lake Erie Commission

An advisory body to the commission, the Dredge Research and Innovation in Farming Team was created under Ohio Revised Code 1506.21(B)(8) to advise on the benefits, appropriateness, and effective methods of applying dredged material to farmland in northwest Ohio.

Also, established through the commission in 2020 was the H2Ohio Technology Assessment Program, which was created to identify technologies that may help address harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie.

### The Nature Conservancy

The Farmer Led Outreach Partners project will train 60 farmers—20 a year over a three-year period—in the Maumee River watershed to engage another 3,000 farmers in education and outreach activities, which may lead to wider adoption of new best management practices aimed at improving soil health and water quality management at the farm level.



## H2Ohio continues to grow, enrolling 3000 farmers



Launched by Gov. Mike DeWine in 2019, H2Ohio is a comprehensive water quality initiative that is

working to strategically address the numerous water issues that have been building in Ohio for decades. To date, almost 3,000 northwest Ohio farmers have enrolled nearly 2 million acres, or 40% of the Western Lake Erie Basin, into the program. In 2021, the program was expanded from the original 14 counties in the watershed to 24, allowing farmers throughout the Western Lake Erie Basin to evaluate their water quality efforts and make the improvements necessary to keep nutrients in the fields.



## OACI partnership gets high marks from independent assessment report

Part of the enrollment process of the H2Ohio program is becoming certified with the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative (OACI), which is a partnership among 18 agriculture, conservation, environmental and research groups. The mission of OACI is to recognize farmers for their dedication to advancing methods that improve water quality in Ohio and increasing the number of best management practices being implemented on farms. Ohio Farm Bureau Director of Water Quality and Research Jordan Hoewischer from OFBF serves on the board and is co-chair of the Farmer Certification committee. An assessment of OACI can be found here (BITLY).

## Soil tests show farmers are doing their part

Phosphorus (P) is an essential nutrient for crop production and continues to be a focus in water quality improvement efforts. The Fertilizer Institute is a consistent source for trusted information and data regarding the use of fertilizers in agriculture. According to its most recent analysis of soil test data, the number of soil samples tested for Ohio increased from about 69,000 in 2001 to nearly 274,000 in 2020. Over the same period, the median soil test phosphorus levels dropped from 38 to 26 parts per million (Mehlich 3).

## Mother Nature has a role in nutrient control

Weather and climate have the biggest role in reducing phosphorus load into Lake Erie. There is a 50% increase in 1 inch or more rains in the last 30 years compared to the prior 30, as well as small areas that get huge amounts of rain, (3, 4 or 5+ inches of rain in a matter of moments), making it impossible to put any measures in place to keep nutrients in the field. Wet conditions are also reducing the time farmers have to be in the field, on average, losing five suitable field days in the spring and five more in the fall. This reduction of time makes it even harder to implement conservation practices that are outside the regular crop rotation.



Blanchard River  
**DEMONSTRATION**  
FARMS NETWORK

In the second half of a 10-year program in conjunction with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the work being done at Blanchard River Demonstration Farm sites throughout northwest Ohio is helping researchers determine which conservation practices work best for reducing nutrient and sediment loss. This information helps show farmers what tools and practices they can implement on their farms to improve agriculture's impact on downstream water quality in Ohio. Learn much more at [blancharddemofarms.org](http://blancharddemofarms.org).



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