



At-A-Glance: The Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act of 2023

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) adversely affect water quality in all 50 states – harming human health, hindering tourism and regional economies, and sinking property values and waterfront business. HABs are caused, in part, by the loading of excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus into lakes, rivers, and bays from farms and animal feeding operations. Since 2010, communities affected by HABs are estimated to have spent over \$1 billion to prevent and mitigate the effects of monthslong seasonal blooms.

Despite federal agencies spending billions of dollars assisting farmers and producers in adopting management practices to improve water quality, HABs persist across all 50 states, including in significant water bodies such as the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay. The **Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act of 2023** provides a new strategy to make federal investments more effective by focusing Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) resources on one of the most critical drivers of HABs – **dissolved reactive phosphorus (DRP)**. Concentrating efforts in priority watersheds focuses valuable attention and resources on areas where DRP reduction has the highest potential to improve water quality. This increases the likelihood of success in reducing the frequency and extent of harmful algal blooms throughout the U.S.

- The **Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Act of 2023** establishes a pilot program under NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The pilot strategically focuses existing NRCS conservation programs on minimizing DRP in federally recognized “**priority watersheds.**” These small, sub-watersheds in critical conservation areas have been identified as areas where DRP reduction has the greatest potential to improve water quality.
 - In the Great Lakes region, priority watersheds have been delineated under the **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative** in the Lower Fox River, Saginaw River, Maumee River, and Genesee River basins in **Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.**
 - Priority watersheds have also been delineated in the states of **New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware** under the **Chesapeake Bay Program.**
- Under the *Healthy Farms Healthy Watersheds Action Program* established by the Act, NRCS will prepare and implement action plans for priority watersheds. Each plan will maximize DRP reduction in the priority watershed for fiscal years 2025 through 2031 and include localized implementation goals paired with an adaptive management plan to flexibly implement the work. Plans also require a blueprint to enhance outreach to eligible partners and producers.
- The *HFHW Action Program* is designed to be implemented using funding already appropriated to carry out EQIP and other existing NRCS conservation programs.

Join **Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-OH-9)** and **Congressman Mike Gallagher (R-WI-08)** in support of this, bipartisan, commonsense, budget-neutral legislation that stretches federal dollars without increasing costs. If you have any questions or wish to co-sponsor this Act, please email Alexander.Rytel@mail.house.gov in Rep. Kaptur's office, or Pauline.Meyer@mail.house.gov in Rep. Gallagher's office. Thank you.