

The Animal Waste Summit
Hosted by the Honorable Senator Tom Harkin
May 5, 1998

Attendance: Senator Harkin, Secretary Glickman, Administrator Browner (EPA), Deputy Secretary Rominger, Undersecretary Lyons, Acting Deputy Undersecretary of Ag. Craig Cox, Assistant Administrator for Water Perciasepe (EPA), Fee Busby (NRCS Special Assistant to the Chief) Livestock Industry Reps., Environmental Reps., State Officials

Summary: The Summit was well-attended with both the morning and afternoon sessions filled to capacity. Senator Harkin began by stating that he believes the cause of the public concern is based on the reports of animal waste contamination around the country. He attributed the increases in contamination to the change in the structure of agriculture, including the increased concentration of livestock and the consequent overburdening of the environment's ability to assimilate the byproducts. He said that a national standard for managing animal waste was needed to "level the playing field". He supported a joint USDA/EPA strategy for dealing with animal waste including setting standards and developing enforcement mechanisms. He went on to say he appreciates the roles of each Department, with USDA as promoter of agriculture and EPA as regulator. He said that we can have a market-driven environmental policy or we can decide what kind of environment that we want first. He said that the trust and privacy of producers needs to be maintained.

Secretary Glickman stated that the issue of excess animal waste was perhaps the biggest issue facing agriculture today. He said that he is not only concerned with the quality of the environment and human health but also the economic viability of livestock production in this country. He sees USDA's role as threefold: providing technical and financial assistance to farmers; researching cost-effective solutions; and going forward as equal partners with EPA. He said that producers are the solution and that he has supported voluntary incentives to achieve environmental goals. Noting that only one EQIP application in three was funded last year, he said that the President had requested an additional \$100 million for EQIP next year which highlights the distinction between EPA and USDA, that EPA is regulatory and USDA is not. He then pointed out that USDA is uniquely positioned to deal with the problem, having more offices than the rest of the government combined.

Administrator Browner stated that she has a deep appreciation for the relationship that NRCS has with farmers and that she wants to help strengthen it. She went on to describe the problem saying that one third of all streams in the US do not meet Clean Water Act requirements and that an estimated 20% of all impaired river miles were due to animal waste. She pointed out that 1.37 billion tons of animal waste is produced each year in the US which is 100 times the amount of human waste. She then listed eight goals: 1. build on the stewardship of farmers; 2. clarify expectations for farmers; 3. enhance current approaches of NRCS and EPA; 4. support locally-led watershed projects; 5. focus research dollars; 6. embrace industry efforts; 7. rely on USDA NRCS' technical relationship with agriculture; and 8. enhance regulatory tools. She said she hoped the EPA strategy, which was released in draft form in April, can be finalized.

There was a panel discussion led by Senator Harkin with Undersecretary Lyons and Mr. Perciasepe of the EPA. Also included was a panel of twelve representatives of various sectors of agribusiness, environmental and farming perspectives. This was followed by an audience discussion in the afternoon initiated by one researcher and representatives of NRCS and EPA. Topics covered a broad range of issues and provided for good dialogue on animal waste management concerns.