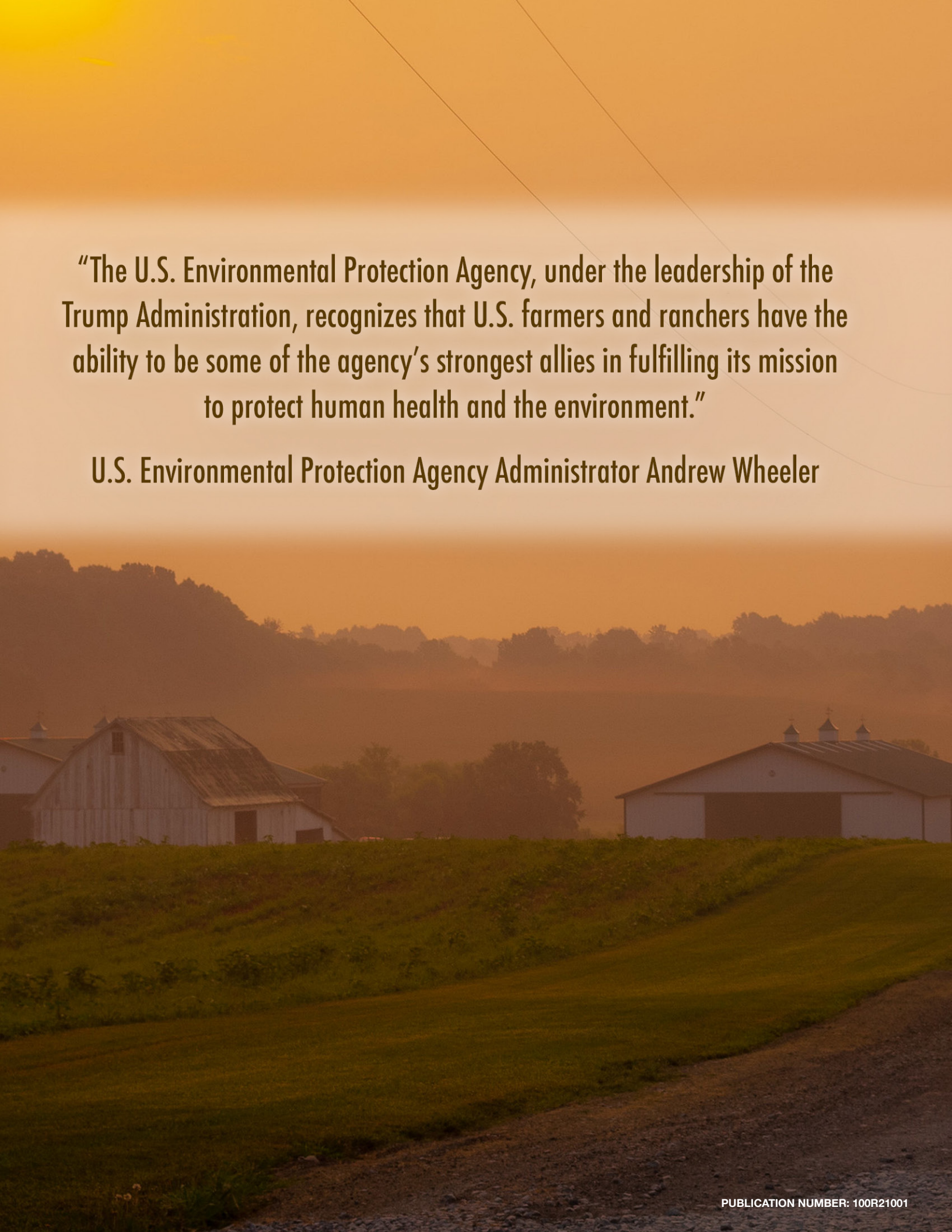




EPA's Support of Rural America 2020





“The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, under the leadership of the Trump Administration, recognizes that U.S. farmers and ranchers have the ability to be some of the agency’s strongest allies in fulfilling its mission to protect human health and the environment.”

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler

EPA ACTIONS IN 2020 WHICH SUPPORTED THE PARTNERSHIP AND RESTORED TRUST WITH AGRICULTURE COMMUNITIES

In 2020, EPA continued to listen to the needs of America's farmers. While navigating unique challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency met with farmers, ranchers and other agriculture stakeholders out in their fields, and found new ways to strengthen our partnership with these important conservationists of the land. EPA took actions to meet the environmental needs of U.S. agriculture, while ensuring decisions were clear, transparent, and based on sound science. Through Administrator Wheeler's direction, EPA worked to restore trust through proactive engagement with the agriculture community, deliver regulatory relief and certainty to U.S. agriculture, and provide environmental support through grants and other tools.

Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Committee: In June, Administrator Wheeler reinstated the Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Committee, appointing 32 members who represent all 10 EPA Regions. This advisory committee will provide valuable independent policy advice, information, and recommendations to the EPA Administrator on a range of environmental issues and policies of importance to agriculture and rural communities.



Since the reinstatement, the Committee has met twice, and received their charge to look at: how EPA can create a holistic pesticide program for the future, and how EPA can support environmental benchmarks with interagency partners on the topics of water quality and quantity, and food loss and waste. The Committee will hold their third public meeting in March of 2021.

Providing Farmers Clarity Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: EPA recognizes the extraordinary situations the agriculture industry has faced since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak and worked across our program offices to ensure continuity in the food supply. Through temporary policies on facility inspections, offering guidance on milk dumping and carcass disposal management and addressing PPE shortages for pesticide application, EPA continues to listen to the agriculture community on what's happening locally and working with additional agencies and the White House on the best ways to assist producers.

Committing to Collaborating with Agriculture: EPA has entered into a series of Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with the intent to increase collaboration and communication with agriculture stakeholders. Throughout the year, EPA Regions entered into agreements with twelve state departments of agriculture, and one state farm bureau focusing on coordinating education and outreach efforts, while recognizing environmental stewardship activities. In addition, Administrator Wheeler signed a first-time MOU with the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy in November 2020.

These MOUs are meant to continue building partnerships with the agriculture community, while promoting sustainability and reaching for environmental successes in mutually beneficial and critical areas. EPA recognizes farmers and ranchers as natural allies in EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment.



Region 5 Administrator Thiede signing an agreement with the Illinois Farm Bureau to strengthen collaboration and improve communication and outreach with farmers, with Illinois Representative Rodney Davis and Illinois Farm Bureau Director of Natural and Environmental Resources Lauren Lurkins.

“The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy is founded on collaboration, and we appreciate EPA's recognition of U.S. dairy's leadership toward building an environmentally sustainable and economically viable future for our industry. We welcome the voluntary opportunities highlighted in the MOU and look forward to EPA participation as a member of the Dairy Sustainability Alliance.”

– Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy President Barbara O'Brien

Not only were the signing of these MOUs navigated during COVID, but EPA had to pivot to find new, creative ways to implement outstanding MOUs, like further collaboration with the National FFA Organization, which EPA entered into an agreement in 2019. This included addressing virtual meetings and collaborating with agency experts on environmental education courses for education purposes.



“Government should work for you — not against you. This agreement lays the foundation for a working partnership making our federal agencies more responsive and better coordinated with our state and local governments,” said U.S. Congressman David Rouzer (NC-07).

“This is one more example of President Trump and his administration putting commonsense and the needs of the American people first by working with stakeholders and the citizens at large rather than dictating.”

ENSURING AVAILABILITY FOR AND SAFE USE OF CROP PROTECTION TOOLS

Innovation in agricultural tools is critical for a healthy environment, the health of farmworkers, and vibrant crops. In 2020, EPA registered 16 new active ingredients, many of which were classified as lower risk, biopesticides, one new import tolerance, 163 new uses of existing pesticides, and re-registered over 50 existing pesticides products. Many of these are providing new tools to help growers meet their pest management needs as well as advancing the best available scientific support for the agency’s work.



Application Exclusion Zone: In October, EPA finalized improvements to requirements for the pesticide application exclusion zone (AEZ) – the area surrounding pesticide application equipment that exists only during outdoor production pesticide applications. EPA’s targeted changes improve the enforceability and workability of the AEZ requirements, decrease regulatory burdens for farmers, and maintain critical worker protections.

Atrazine: In September, EPA announced new measures to protect human health, mitigate potential ecological risks with the interim decision for atrazine, the second most widely used herbicide in the United States, giving clarity and certainty concerning continued use to growers.

Biostimulants: In November, EPA released updated draft guidance for plant bio stimulants for a second round of public comment. Plant bio stimulants are a relatively new but growing category of products containing naturally occurring substances and microbes. Plant bio stimulants can also reduce the use of synthetic chemical fertilizers, making it an attractive option for sustainable agriculture and integrated pest management programs. When finalized, EPA’s Plant Bio stimulants Guidance will provide sought-after certainty and transparency for this growing area of the economy.

Biotechnology: Under President Trump’s Executive Order on Modernizing the Regulatory Framework for Agricultural Biotechnology Products, EPA, in coordination with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Food and Drug Administration, launched a unified website in January 2020 that provides a one-stop-shop for information about the actions the federal government is taking to oversee the development of agricultural biotechnology products. EPA continued to remove barriers to biotechnology innovation in September, by proposing exemptions under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) and the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (FFDCA) for certain PIPs created through biotechnology. By reducing antiquated regulations that restrict access to the market for biotechnology products, science-based innovations to agriculture will become far more accessible to American farmers.

Dicamba: EPA wants farmers to have the choice on what to use in their fields. In June, EPA fought to let farmers use already purchased dicamba after the vacatur order of dicamba registrations from the 9th Circuit of Appeals. EPA listened to the communities overwhelming response, and in October, EPA approved new five-year registrations for two dicamba products and extended the registration of an additional dicamba product. All three registrations include new control measures to ensure these products can be used effectively while protecting the environment, including non-target plants, animals, and other crops not tolerant to dicamba. These registrations are only for use on dicamba-tolerant cotton and soybeans and will expire in 2025, providing certainty to American agriculture for the upcoming growing season and beyond.



Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Partnership Program: In January 2021, EPA announced a renewed commitment to partnering with the agricultural community to work on innovative solutions for pesticide management. The \$2 million Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Partnership Program (PESP) will support research and initiatives supporting agriculture and aligning with the agency’s goal of providing a healthier environment for all Americans.

Pollinator Protection: In June, Administrator Wheeler signed a proclamation designating the week of June 22 as National Pollinator Week – for the first time in the 50-year history of EPA. EPA also renewed its memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Pollinator Partnership, a nonprofit organization that facilitates actions that benefit pollinator habitats. In September, EPA co-hosted the Pollinator State of Science Workshop webinar with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The goal of the webinar was to identify outcome-based strategies to mitigate the potential impact of multiple stressors influencing pollinator declines. Participants, representing a wide range of stakeholders, discussed USDA research to identify ways to improve pollinator health through collaborative efforts across a wide range of government, industry, growers, academia and other stakeholders.

SUPPORTING THE RENEWABLE FUEL STANDARD

Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS): EPA has consistently increased the renewable volume obligations, supporting farmers through actions under the RFS Program. EPA worked to ensure a net of 15 billion gallons of conventional biofuel are blended into the nation’s fuel supply, for the first time since the program’s inception. In 2020, EPA moved to deny petitions for small refinery exemptions for past compliance years to protect the integrity of the RFS. EPA is engaging with stakeholders across the U.S. to expand the number of approved fuel pathways, adding diversity to the biofuel mix. As promised, EPA eliminated a significant barrier to E15 market access, and E15 is now available in 30 states at over 2,000 stations.



ENSURING ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER

“Farmers and ranchers care about clean water and preserving the land, which are essential to producing healthy food and fiber and ensuring future generations can do the same. That’s why we support the new clean water rule. It provides clarity and certainty, allowing farmers to understand water regulations without having to hire teams of consultants and lawyers. We appreciate the commitment of the agencies involved and this administration to crafting a new regulation that achieves important regulatory oversight while allowing farmers to farm.

Clean water, clear rules.”

– American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall

Navigable Waters Protection Rule: EPA replaced the Waters of the U.S. rule with the now final Navigable Waters Protection Rule, which streamlines the definition of “waters of the United States” so that it includes four simple categories of jurisdictional waters, provides clear exclusions for many water features that traditionally have not been regulated, and defines terms in the regulatory text that have never been defined before. Providing clarity, predictability and consistency to landowners in rural America. The rule went into effect on June 22, 2020.

WIFIA Loans: The EPA's Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program is providing financial support for water infrastructure at a critical time as the federal government, EPA, and the water sector work together to help mitigate the public health and financial impacts of COVID-19. The EPA's WIFIA federal loan and guarantee program provides long-term, low-cost supplemental credit assistance for significant projects on a regional and national level. In 2020, the EPA closed 32 transactions totaling over \$5.2 billion to help finance over \$10.8 billion in water infrastructure projects across the country. This will create approximately 34,000 jobs and save borrowers about \$497 million in lowered interest rates.

State Revolving Funds: The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (CWSRF and DWSRF) play an integral role in President Trump's efforts to improve and upgrade the nation's water infrastructure and to ensure all Americans have access to clean and safe water. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, the DWSRF committed \$2.8 billion for improved drinking water infrastructure, and funded an additional \$178 million for critical activities including operator certification, water system capacity development, and source water protection. The CWSRF program is the largest public source of water quality financing in the country and has funded over \$700 million in agricultural best management practices (BMPs). The BMPs include feedlot runoff control, manure management and conservation tillage, and erosion control.

“President Trump and his Administration are committed to making it easier for farmers to succeed and to ensure they are the most innovative in the world. Administrator Wheeler's action plan on water reuse will help inspire creative, problem-solving that boosts production on farms, ranches, and private forests – ultimately improving water quality, soil health, and wildlife habitat,” said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue.

Water Reuse Action Plan: In February, Administrator Wheeler, joined by federal, state, tribal, and water sector partners, announced the release of the National Water Reuse Action Plan (WRAP): Collaborative Implementation. Safe and reliable water supplies for human consumption, agriculture, business, industry, recreation and healthy ecosystems are critical to our nation's communities and economy. Due to various pressures, 40 U.S. states anticipate freshwater shortages within their borders in the next decade. Water reuse (also known as water recycling or reclamation) is a powerful option to enhance the availability and effective use of our nation's water resources. The WRAP continues to grow and adopt new actions that address challenges and barriers to fulfill state, tribal, and water sector needs related to water reuse.



Water Subcabinet: On October 13th, President Trump signed an Executive Order 13956 “*Modernizing America's Water Resource Management and Water Infrastructure.*” This action ensures Federal coordination on water policy is standard practice now and into the future by formally establishing a Water Subcabinet (WSC) of senior Federal agency officials to facilitate efficient and effective management and modernization of our water supplies and systems while also eliminating duplication between agencies. Represented by six Agency officials at the assistant secretary/administrator-level, the WSC is directed to coordinate and collaborate on cross-cutting issues impacting water supply, water quality, water infrastructure, water forecasting, flood control, and water sector workforce, among other critical topics. EPA cochairs the WSC with the Department of Interior.

The WSC Executive Order also includes directives to promote integrating planning, accelerate market-based mechanisms to achieve positive environmental outcomes, ensure water reuse's role in meeting the needs of the 21st century water economy, improve geospatial mapping tools of the nation's water resources, and a variety of other directives that will ensure EPA's mission of protecting public health and the environment is coordinated with the major federal agencies with water equity and investment capacity.

EPA'S EXPANDED EFFORTS TO APPROACH ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

“EPA supports cutting-edge research to help agricultural and rural economies better address the potential impact of PFAS on ranches, farms and rural communities,” said EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. “This research helps our colleagues at the federal, state, and local level better understand the exposure risks of PFAS to private drinking water wells. This, in turn, will improve future disposal methods and treatment systems for the chemical.”

PFAS: EPA expanded efforts to address the potential impacts of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on water quality and availability in rural communities and agricultural operations across the United States. In February 2020, EPA released the first-ever PFAS Action Plan Program Update, delivering on the Administrator’s commitment – continuing the momentum under the plan and reaching key milestones under the agency’s first multi-media, multi-program, national research, management, and risk communication plan to address a challenge like PFAS.

In August, EPA awarded \$4.8 million in grants to research for potential impacts and treatment of PFAS in rural America and the agricultural sector.

Setting the Pace on Reducing Food Waste: In 2020, EPA worked to continue to build upon success in garnering attention on the need to address food loss and waste. Wasted food is the single largest category of material placed in municipal landfills and contributes to methane emissions. Wasted food also represents missed opportunities to feed families in need, feed animals and conserve both economic and energy resources. In December, EPA, USDA and the FDA resigned the formal agreement behind the *Winning on Reducing Food Waste Initiative* for three years to enhance federal collaboration on existing food waste reduction programs across the three agencies.



In 2020, EPA and USDA have welcomed ten new businesses and organizations to the *U.S. Food Loss and Waste 2030 Champions*. The Champions have made the commitment to reduce food loss and waste by 50 percent in their own operations by 2030. The list of Champions include: Ahold Delhaize, Amazon, Aramark, Blue Apron, Bon Appetit, Browns Superstores, Campbells, Compass Group, ConAgra, Farmstead, General Mills, Giant Eagle, Hello Fresh, Hilton, Kellogg’s, Kroger, Las Vegas Sands, Marley Spoon, Meijer, MGM Resorts, Mom’s Organic Market, Pepsico, Sodexo, Sprouts, The Wendy’s Company, UNFI, Unilever, Walmart, Walt Disney World, Wegmans, Weis, Whitsons and Yum! Brands.

In addition to U.S. Food Loss and Waste 2030 Champions, EPA has engaged with local, tribal, state and territorial governments interested in making a commitment to food waste reduction by signing the agency’s Reducing Food Waste pledge.

PROVIDING ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT THROUGH GRANTS AND OTHER TOOLS

Benefitting Animal Producers from Biogas Recovery: EPA supports the acceleration of new and enhanced anaerobic digestion capacity in the U.S through the AgSTAR program. Through this program, EPA assists those who enable, purchase or implement anaerobic digesters by identifying project benefits, risks, options and opportunities. Using biogas recovery systems, animal producers reduce methane emissions from livestock waste, while achieving social, environmental, agricultural and economic benefits.

Improving Water Quality in Rural America: EPA awards regional grants to improve water quality, habitat, and environmental education. In 2019, EPA distributed more than \$165 million in Section 319 grants to states, territories, and tribes to reduce nonpoint runoff in urban and rural settings in FY20. Over the last two years, states restored over 80 waters and reduced over 17 million pounds of nitrogen, nearly 4 million pounds of phosphorus, and 3.5 million tons of excess sediment through Section 319 projects.

Next Gen Fertilizer Challenge: In August, EPA partnered with USDA to launch the joint EPA-USDA partnership and competition on Next Gen Fertilizers to Advance Agricultural Sustainability in the U.S. Along with EPA and USDA, the competition is in collaboration with the Fertilizer Institute, the International Fertilizer Development Center, the Nature Conservancy, and the National Corn Growers Association. The competition includes two challenges that seek proposals for new and existing fertilizer technologies to maintain or improve crop yields while reducing the impacts of fertilizers on the environment.

Revitalizing Small Towns and Rural Communities: EPA supports locally led, community-driven efforts, through the Local Foods, Local Places program. Selected applicants receive help from the agency to protect air and water quality, preserve open space and farmland, boost economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses, improve access to healthy local food, and promote childhood wellness.

Smart Sectors Program: In the Spring of 2020, the partnership program released an interactive, web-based “sector snapshot,” a tool designed to provide the public easy access to historical environmental and economic performance data on the agriculture sector basis over 20 years.

CONTINUING OUTREACH TO AGRICULTURE AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

EPA’s National Agriculture Advisor’s Office and Regional Agriculture Advisors: The Office enables two-way communication between EPA and agriculture stakeholders about priority environmental issues. Each EPA Region has an agriculture advisor, who engages with their local farmers and agriculture groups to relay regulatory information from the agency impacting agriculture while soliciting feedback.

Two websites are ran through the Ag Advisor’s Office and EPA’s National Agriculture Center, which provides all growers, livestock producers, other agribusinesses, and agricultural information/education providers find regulatory and non-regulatory agriculture-related information, recent press releases and other items of interest to the agriculture community from across EPA. These sites also includes examples of environmental programs and partnerships with the agriculture sector. Visit EPA’s Agriculture Advisor’s Corner: <https://www.epa.gov/agriculture/ag-advisor-corner> and EPA’s National Agriculture Center: <https://www.epa.gov/agriculture/about-epas-national-agriculture-center>.



BOOTS ON THE GROUND – EPA REGIONAL OFFICES PARTNERING WITH U.S. AGRICULTURE

“New England communities have a rich industrial and agricultural heritage dating back to the earliest post-colonial communities; this legacy provides multiple ways that EPA programs can meaningfully engage in partnerships to enhance public health protection, help spur economic revitalization, and protect our environment. From supporting development of best practices for our unique cranberry bog agricultural sector to helping post-industrial urban communities safely turn to local community gardening during a pandemic, Region 1 had a lasting, beneficial impact on New England agriculture in 2020.”

– Region 1 Administrator Dennis Deziel

REGION 1: NEW ENGLAND

Priority Source Water Protection Projects: Region 1 has been working to direct 10% of NRCS funds towards priority source water protection projects in the region, a requirement of the 2018 Farm Bill. In FY2020, the Region 1 drinking water program coordinated closely with the states and NRCS to prioritize specific drinking water source protection areas for the \$6 million in Farm Bill funds. In addition, the collaboration has resulted in each of the six NRCS state offices establishing a Source Water Protection/Water Quality subcommittee as part of their State Technical Committee.

Supporting Agriculture, Fisheries and Local Food Systems in New England

in 2020: In a year impacted by COVID-19, support has been challenging. A Local Food/Local Places project in Woonsocket, RI brought together Smart Sectors, Brownfields, Opportunity Zones and Environmental Justice all in support of growing the local food system for the economically distressed community. When a contractor could not support a community food innovation tour due to the pandemic, EPA stepped in to arrange a COVID-friendly community event with the R1 Regional Administrator and key state and local stakeholders, including the Chief of Agriculture at RI DEM. When COVID concerns disrupted traditional soilSHOP program activities (where the Region’s mobile lab helps local communities test for lead in soil samples, among other in-community lab services), the Region created a new, modified soilSHOP protocol in partnership with the Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District focused on helping inform at-home, community and urban agriculture practitioners on the safe soil practices to minimize lead exposure while growing food – a growing practice during the pandemic as more people turned to at-home and local food production in urban areas. To help amplify these and other lessons learned from specific community efforts during the pandemic and to help bring together cross-agency resources, EPA Region 1 has been participating on a regional inter-agency COVID economic recovery task force lead by FEMA. There has been significant focus on food systems, urban agriculture, and commercial agriculture and aquaculture operations, which have been identified as high priority needs by the states, tribes, and communities engaged by this team.

Supporting Agricultural Innovation Improving Local Water Quality: Through the Long Island Futures Fund, part of Region 1’s Long Island Sound Geographic Program, funding was awarded to help the Essex County Natural Resources Conservation District develop a cover cropping species mix, planting strategy, and method for monitoring reductions in nitrogen from farm runoff in the Upper Connecticut River Basin. Also through the Futures Fund, the Region provided nearly \$200,000 to support the Vermont Land Trust’s work generating ecological assessments and riparian/wetland restoration plans for 12 farmland conservation projects, as well as a watershed-wide plan for a market-based financing model that will incentivize on-farm nitrogen reduction projects within Vermont’s Connecticut River (and Long Island Sound) watershed. On Cape Cod, EPA’s Southeastern New England Estuaries Program (SNEP) provided over \$230,000 to Mt. Holyoke College in support of a project studying the effectiveness of an innovative, low-tech method for reducing nitrogen pollution to coastal waters from cranberry farming operations. These bioreactors could provide a model for restoring water quality in a host of degraded ecosystems.



EPA Region 1 Jessica Dominguez, at the EPA/ ATSDR/USDA soilSHOP, 2019 Connecticut Plant Science Day.



REGION 2: NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, PUERTO RICO & U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

“The EPA is pleased to be closely engaged with the farm community. Our farm families are important stewards of our natural resources and we are pleased that we can work together to protect the environment, even as they produce food and fiber for our nation.”

– EPA Region 2 Administrator Peter Lopez

Genesee River, NY Watershed Demonstration Farms Network:

With \$951,328 of funding from EPA’s Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, American Farmland Trust is working with a diverse set of partners to accelerate adoption of soil regenerative and nutrient management practices in the Genesee River Watershed through on farm demonstrations and farmer-led trainings and outreach. As a result of these practices, American Farmland Trust estimates that 45 lbs. of phosphorus, 30 tons of sediment and 7,500 lbs. of nitrogen will be prevented from entering the Genesee River watershed over the 3 years of the project. The outcome of its efforts will reach farther into the watershed and impact 1,200 farmers, affecting 115,000 acres of corn and soybean acres and reducing phosphorus and sediment by 80% and nitrogen by 75% in the Genesee River watershed.



Photo Credit: Kevin Keenan

New York City Watershed: The New York City Watershed Agricultural Program is a unique program driven and led by farmers and protects New York City drinking water quality through Whole Farm Plans, which combine financial investment in structural environmental improvements with agricultural best management practices. The program – started by New York City and the watershed farm community and funded through the New York City Department of Environmental Protection – is a win for both water quality and agriculture.



Photo Credit: Katie Lynch

REGION 3: MID-ATLANTIC

“In 2020, we signed agreements with our state agriculture departments to expand the collaborative activities our agencies are taking together and with the broader agricultural community to promote a vibrant farm economy and clean environment,” said Servidio. “Working together to find solutions that benefit both agriculture and the environment is a template for success and has led to similar agreements in other regions of the country.”

– Region 3 Administrator Cosmo Servidio

Furthering Collaborations with Agriculture Communities: The EPA Mid-Atlantic Region was the first to sign Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with State agriculture agencies in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. These MOUs formalize and enhance EPA Region 3’s successful collaboration with the agricultural community to achieve the shared goal of well-managed, sustainable farms and a clean environment.

These five-year agreements expand activities related to communication, education and outreach, training, regulatory program coordination, and funding of agricultural practices that benefit the environment. Examples of activities EPA and the State agriculture agencies will carry out are:

- Hosting Agriculture Roundtables and Educational Farm Tours to foster a dialogue between EPA and the agricultural community on the successes, challenges, and opportunities to work together to achieve well-managed, productive farms and a clean environment.
- Participating in agricultural events such as State fairs, farm shows, and technical field days to expand open discussion between EPA and the agricultural community.
- Recognizing farmers for their environmental stewardship and conservation efforts that contribute to

economically viable farms, healthy soils, and a clean environment.

- Leveraging federal, state and private funding to support agricultural conservation practices and environmental protection.
- Convening annual meetings with state and federal leaders on priorities and activities, as well as joint trainings to ensure effective implementation of federal and state regulatory programs.

This ethic of working together in partnership is spreading throughout the country with similar MOUs in the Southeast and Great Lakes EPA regions.



EPA Region 3 Administrator Cosmo Servidio stands with the Landis family on Worth the Wait Farms to sign an agreement with Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to expand collaborative efforts supporting healthy farms and a clean environment. September 30, 2020.

REGION 4: SOUTHEAST

“Region 4 has made it a priority to better engage with the agricultural stakeholder community. We now have Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with all eight of our state departments of agriculture. These historic agreements are an acknowledgement that when it comes to environmental protection, agriculture is part of the solution.”

– Region 4 Administrator Mary Walker

Strengthening Relationships with the Agricultural Community: EPA Region 4 has prioritized building, fostering and strengthening our relationships with the agricultural stakeholder community. In 2020, EPA Region 4 successfully negotiated, finalized and executed Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with all eight of the region’s state departments of agriculture, making Region 4 the first and only region in the country to achieve this accomplishment. The MOU symbolizes EPA’s and the state departments of agriculture’s commitment to partnership. The agencies recognize that partnership is needed to address environmental concerns, which ultimately mutually benefits both environmental protection and agricultural production. The MOUs include commitments to better improve communication, coordination, education and outreach, as well as promoting outstanding environmental stewardship.

In 2020, Region 4 coordinated and/or participated in over 20 agriculture events, which included hosting five events with EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. In addition to signing the Memoranda of Understanding, Regional Administrator Walker personally visited and toured agricultural operations in four states, engaging directly with farmers. The response from southeastern agriculture stakeholders has been tremendous. The positive relationships established will undoubtedly yield greater engagement for many years to come.

Farmer to Farmer Grant Program: EPA Region 4 is focused on all issues facing farmers and the agricultural industry. EPA’s Farmer to Farmer program is a collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders and organizations across an entire watershed with a focus on reducing nutrient pollution resulting from excess nitrogen and phosphorous in our water and air. This grant program provides funding to improve water quality, habitat, resilience and environmental education through the demonstration of innovative practices on working lands. The project is designed to support farmer-led or farm focused organizations in the Gulf of Mexico watershed within the continental United States. Since 2017, EPA has awarded over \$9.5 million to projects with a variety of partners to show nutrient reduction progress in the Mississippi-Atchafalaya River Basin. In FY2020, EPA’s investment is \$10 million with an anticipated 12 recipients.



EPA Region 4 signed MOUs with all eight states in their region in 2020, with 7 signings in-person following CDC guidelines for safety. Due to COVID-19 concerns, EPA Region 4 pivoted to host a virtual signing with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

REGION 5: GREAT LAKES

“The agricultural community is not only vital to the health and vitality of our economy, but also that of our environment. Because of the efforts made over the past year to rebuild this critical partnership, EPA and our agricultural partners are better prepared to achieve our shared goals and serve the American people.”

– Region 5 Administrator Kurt Thiede

Partnering with the Agriculture Community: During 2020, Regional Administrator Kurt Thiede sat down in nearly a dozen machine shops across all Region 5 states to hear directly from Farm Bureaus and farmers about their challenges and successes. These opportunities resulted in better partnerships, and a commitment to sharing information about conservation practices. These best practices allow farmers to protect their environment and communities, while simultaneously operating their farms in a more efficient manner.

Commitment to Partnering with the Agriculture Community: EPA Region 5 is committed to partnerships that continue collaborative efforts recognizing agricultural environmental stewardship through improved communications and outreach. To demonstrate this partnership, EPA Region 5 and the Illinois Farm Bureau signed the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of its kind that commits to improved communication, education, outreach, and training of agricultural practices that are economically viable while also benefitting the environment over the next 5 years. Agreements such as this MOU are critical for keeping lines of communication with agricultural producers open and engaging more effectively with the agricultural community.

Working with Farmers to Restore the Great Lakes Watershed: This year, EPA celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), which has contributed to a dramatic improvement in water quality and sustainable habitat across the Great Lakes Region. GLRI has funded more than 5,400 projects totaling over \$2.7 billion over the last decade to improve water quality, protect and restore habitat, control invasive species and manage other challenges in the Great Lakes ecosystem. Recipients include thousands of farmers, who implement conservation practices across the Great Lakes Basin that have reduced phosphorus by over 1 million pounds in target areas since 2010.

EPA Region 5 was successful in the official delisting of the Lower Menominee River Area of Concern in August. This was the fifth area of concern to be delisted in our nation’s history – and the first in Wisconsin. Contaminated river sediment and degraded habitat had impaired public benefits such as healthy fisheries, uncontaminated shipping channels, and wildlife habitats. Over \$170 million was invested in the restoration effort, with \$28 million of GLRI funding for habitat and sediment projects, leveraging \$15 million from non-federal sponsors.

Continuous improvement in reducing excess nutrients and sediment throughout the Great Lakes Basin is a major priority for EPA and our partners. To make progress towards that goal, while also promoting innovation and best practices, Region 5 awarded nearly \$11 million in GLRI funding for 20 nutrient-reduction projects. This included the very first EPA competitive grant opportunity for innovative market-based projects under the GLRI program designed to accelerate nutrient reduction efforts in the Great Lakes Basin.



Following a visit with farmers in Indiana, Region 5 Administrator Thiede speaks to Indiana Farm Bureau President Randy Kron.

REGION 6: ARKANSAS, LOUISIANA, NEW MEXICO, OKLAHOMA & TEXAS

“In Region 6, Agriculture is at the heart of our economic vitality and a significant part of our lives. Farmers and ranchers are our nation’s first environmentalists, committed to sustaining productive and quality land and soil throughout America. We are dedicated to working with our Ag community across the region to ensure the continued success of the sector, as they provide essential foods and goods – from seed to table to stores – for consumers around the world.”

– EPA Region 6 Administrator Ken McQueen

Increased Engagement with Agriculture Partners:

Agriculture is a primary economic driver in all five states in EPA’s Region 6 (South Central US). In November 2019, Region 6 launched its Agriculture Smart Sectors program at an event attended by over 50 representatives from numerous agriculture interests, including state agriculture departments and conservation agencies, farm bureaus, commodity groups from animal agriculture, grain and row crops. In addition to Regional Administrator Ken McQueen and his senior leadership team, representatives from EPA Headquarters Ag Policy Office and Smart Sectors Program participated. As a follow-up, Region 6 held an additional agriculture Smart Sectors event in January with State Department of Agriculture Secretaries from Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. To finish out the year, Region 6 held its second Agriculture Smart Sectors event, this time virtually, again with over 50 representatives from varied agriculture interests. As a result of input received at these engagements Region 6 has improved its communication with the agricultural sector. For example, the Region 6 Ag Advisor now sends weekly updates to an expanded community of agriculture sector professionals on topics such as pesticide approvals and trainings, enforcement flexibility, and water quality policy changes. Additionally, the regional Ag Advisor has followed up on requests made by event participants, such as a request from the pork sector for technical assistance clarifying EPA’s guidance on carcass disposal should a pandemic occur in the sector as it did in China.



EPA Region 6 Administrator Ken McQueen addresses Region 6’s Smart Sectors Agriculture Launch Event. November 21, 2019.



Assisting in Reducing Polluted Runoff: Region 6 is proud of its collaboration that has led to 168 formerly polluted waterbodies being restored to meet water quality standards. Thanks to the efforts of state nonpoint source programs which are utilizing EPA Clean Water Action (CWA) 319h funds and USDA-NRCS funds, they have collaborated with farmers and ranchers who have voluntarily installed hundreds of best management practices to contain polluted runoff from reaching these waterbodies.

Administrator Wheeler Tours Arkansas Agriculture: One such farmer successfully integrating the use of CWA 319 and USDA funds to control polluted runoff is Terry Dabbs, owner of L.T.D. Farms of Stuttgart, Arkansas. As a member of the Arkansas Farm Bureau, Mr. Dabbs attended the Region 6 Agriculture Smart Sectors events and invited RA McQueen to visit his farm. Arrangements were made and not only did RA McQueen make the visit but joining him was EPA Administrator Wheeler. A roundtable was hosted at the farm that included Arkansas Attorney General Leslie Rutledge, Arkansas Department of Energy & Environment Secretary Becky Keogh, Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward, and Arkansas Farm Bureau President Rich Hillman. Arkansas Senate Public Health, Welfare, Arkansas House Agriculture, Forestry, and Economic Development Committee Chair Dan Douglas, and staff from Arkansas Senator John Boozman, Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton, and Congressman Bruce Westerman were also in attendance. During the roundtable, they discussed issues of importance including the Navigable Waters Protection Rule, which is providing regulatory certainty for farmers across the country, the recent registration announcement of Dicamba, and the Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Federal Advisory Committee.

REGION 7: KANSAS, IOWA, MISSOURI & NEBRASKA

“Collectively in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska—Agriculture is the largest industry and the most dominant land use, with more than 290,000 producers. Add to that the farm equipment, fuel, and seed, the Ag-chemical support, the harvest, storage and transportation infrastructure, and it is clear to see just how important agriculture is here in the Heartland. While 2020 was a challenging year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EPA Region 7 adapted, innovated, and executed on our mission. And we did this work in partnership with the agriculture community. I’m glad to report that our partnerships are expanding quickly with a wide range of stakeholders on issues including: (1) commonsense nutrient management solutions aimed at improving water quality, including harmful algal blooms; (2) creating certainty and clarity for the regulated community; and, (3) advancing our abilities at managing the smoke from prescribed burns in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Strengthening our partnerships with those in and around the agriculture sector is a priority, and the regional office is making important progress. Stakeholder events, such as the Great Plains and Midwest Harmful Algal Blooms conference, and the Smart Sectors renewable fuels roundtable provide opportunities for collaboration toward achieving mutual goals.”

– EPA Region 7 Administrator Jim Gulliford

Commonsense Nutrient Management Solutions Aimed at Improving Water Quality--Harmful Algal Blooms:

In 2020, we once again prioritized work on commonsense nutrient management solutions aimed at improving water quality. Region 7 partnered with the Office of Research and Development, Region 5, Region 8 and the Office of Water to host the multi-regional Great Plains and Midwest Harmful Algal Bloom Conference on February 4 - 6, 2020 at the University of Kansas Edwards Campus in Overland Park, Kansas. The workshop brought together over 170 participants from 17 states, 2 tribes, agricultural partners from the Great Plains and Midwest, as well as experts on HABs prevention, mitigation and control, such as the University of Kansas Designated Research Center Kansas Biological Survey. Region 7 is finalizing a proceedings document summarizing the successes, challenges, and short and long-term opportunities identified by workshop participants.



Some of the attendees at February 4-6, 2020, Great Plains and Midwest Harmful Algal Bloom Conference at the University of Kansas Edwards Campus in Overland Park, Kansas. Region 7

Our work with partners is focused on better predicting and preventing the occurrence of HABs; providing information to the public and agricultural stakeholders on how to identify and report them; and responding rapidly to state and tribal requests for technical assistance. So far, our partnerships have resulted in:

- The planting of ~145,000 acres of cover crops
- The removal of water quality impairments from 89 waterbodies
- Addressing nonpoint source pollution, primarily in agriculture, leading to the decrease of more than 418,000 pounds of Nitrogen & 244,000 pounds of Phosphorus a year and, 205,000 tons of sediment – enough to fill more than 17,000 dump trucks!
- We are also supporting nutrient reduction strategies and practices through market-based approaches such as Water Quality Trading.

As our understanding of the close relationship between agricultural practices and benefits from restored systems improve, interest has grown in a variety of land management practices used to enhance ecosystem services at

the watershed scale. The state of Iowa, EPA Region 7, and EPA's Office of Research and Development are now working together to study the benefits and tradeoffs of these practices.

Greater Certainty and Clarity for Regulated Community: Providing greater certainty and clarity to the Agriculture community has been a critical part of our focus during the past few years. In total, there are 1,588 agricultural facilities in Region 7 that must adhere to the requirements of the RMP. They make up 73% of Region 7's RMP facilities, while only 31% of RMP facilities are agricultural nationally. Region 7 has been providing training for these agricultural anhydrous ammonia retail facilities on how to correctly implement the Risk Management Plan Rule for Chemical Accident Prevention under 112(r) of the Clean Air Act. We've hosted on-site workshops and mock inspections to teach them how to stay in compliance. Due to the pandemic, we moved these efforts to virtual platforms by hosting and recording webinars, conferences, and workshops; and by developing asynchronous web training modules.



EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler and Region 7 Administrator Jim Gulliford meet with U.S. Representatives Vicky Hartzler (MO-04) and Jason Smith (MO-08), and farmers from the Missouri Farm Bureau and Missouri Corn Growers Association in Niangua, Missouri.

Smart Sectors: The region also hosted a Smart Sectors event focused on renewable fuels to discuss EPA connections to a wide range of current and emerging issues. Improving how the agency works with the agriculture sector is an important priority for EPA's two Midwestern regional offices, Regions 5 and 7. EPA Smart Sectors is a partnership program that provides a platform to collaborate with regulated sectors and develop sensible approaches that better protect the environment and public health and a sharing of knowledge. The December Smart Sectors' renewable fuels roundtable event provided a unique forum to bring together leadership from EPA Region 5 and 7 to hear individual real-world input from renewable fuels representatives from across the Midwest to better understand three specific renewable fuels issues:

1. Conditions necessary to expand biofuels distribution infrastructure (i.e., blender pump requirements or underground storage tank use)
2. Impacts of State Implementation Plans on E15 production and use (i.e., state SIPs connections to ethanol distribution); and,
3. Compliance assistance needed to help facility operators meet state and federal requirements.

Smoke Management for the Flint Hills Prescribed Burns: And finally, we have continued to grow our partnerships with stakeholders on Smoke Management efforts for the prescribed burns that occur in the Flint Hills. Our goal is to minimize smoke impacts to downwind communities while preserving this endangered fire-dependent ecosystem and ensuring viable rangeland.

The tallgrass prairie ecosystem is a natural wonder, but invasive plant species like red cedar can quickly overwhelm the natural grasses. The prairie is a great source of pride, rich in cattle ranching tradition, and survives thanks to traditional land management practices that mimic pre-settlement conditions. These prescribed burns are vital for the ecosystem's health, and the viability of cattle ranching. Yet, the challenge of managing prescribed burns in a way that minimizes downwind air quality impacts remains. Our partners include the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, cattlemen, K-State & Extension, and other federal, state and local agencies.

The 2010 Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan and our work together since then demonstrate that prescribed fires can be managed in a way to reduce air quality impacts and avoid potential regulatory implications. This helps us to achieve our goal of protecting public health and preserving the tall grass ecosystem – while also supporting the agriculture economy.



A crew member monitors a Flint Hills Kansas prescribed burn.

REGION 8: MOUNTAINS & PLAINS

“Our partnership with the Future Farmers of America led to some great opportunities to work with the next generation of farmers and ranchers in Region 8.”

– EPA Region 8 Acting Administrator Debra H. Thomas

Engaging with Future Farmers of

America: In January 2020, FFA students from around Colorado learned about natural resource careers with the federal government from EPA, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Bureau of Reclamation. EPA presented a mock emergency clean-up exercise where students saw firsthand the various job types involved in a clean-up including; risk communications, response and investigation. In February 2020, Region 8 staff served as judges in Wyoming FFA Agri-science Fair. EPA staff judged projects in the following categories: Environmental Service/Natural Resource Systems, Food Products and Processing Systems, Plant Systems, and Social Science.



Region 8 EPA Staff talk with local FFA students in Montana in summer of 2020.

Communication with State Lead

Agencies: Region 8 hosted monthly calls with the state agriculture directors. At those calls, many issues were discussed related to COVID-19 and other environmental issues. For example, supply chain disruption resulted in milk dumping at dairies (related to COVID-19 school closures) and carcass disposal concerns from COVID-19 outbreaks and temporary closure of meat processing plants. Other items discussed during the calls included continuity of operations and how to conduct emergency response and other required field work in a safe manner. The Region 8 Regional Administrator also attended the Region 7 & 8 State Department of Agriculture meeting. Agricultural tours were conducted in Montana and North Dakota in 2020.

Collaboration Across The Food System: In December 2020, Region 8 discussed food waste reduction strategies and EPA collaboration with agriculture at *Iconic Times for Colorado Agriculture: 2020 Learnings and 2021 Futureproofing* virtual event. Speakers included: Colorado Governor Jared Polis, Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture Kate Greenberg, and Former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

REGION 9: PACIFIC SOUTHWEST

“During 2020 agriculture was a key priority for EPA in the Pacific Southwest. We made important progress in areas ranging from pesticide safety outreach and farm equipment emissions reductions to engagement with growers on composting and healthy soils.”

– R9 Regional Administrator John Busterud

Partnerships and Outreach:

Region 9 senior managers have reached out to and met with the Arizona Farm Bureau, Hawaii Farm Bureau, and has convened an EPA Smart Sectors workgroup meeting in California’s Central Valley. Regular engagement with USDA NRCS and State agricultural and pesticide regulatory agencies continues through the R9 Ag Advisor and staff.

On-farm Composting/Healthy

Soils: EPA Region 9 co-created the On-Farm Compost Work Group with California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), Cal EPA and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The group is an interagency collaboration between 15 federal, state, and regional agencies. Participants are committed to develop a regulatory pathway to address permitting challenges and create incentives to support on-farm composting of agricultural materials to decrease nutrient loading, reduce agricultural burning, and improve soil health. This model follows the highly successful 2012 “Federal State Dairy Digester Working Group”, whose efforts reduced barriers to permitting dairy digesters. To support composting and California’s Healthy Soils work, we hosted in February 2020 a dialogue between California Central Coast growers and senior leaders from EPA Region 9, CDFA and USDA-NRCS.

“Spray Safe” Pesticide Education: California’s San Joaquin Valley, home to an intensively productive agricultural economy, has experienced several pesticide drifts events in recent years, with exposed agricultural workers needing follow-up hospitalization. In FY2020 EPA Region 9 partnered with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation and California’s 58 agricultural commissioners to fund and deliver several well-attended pesticide educations and outreach trainings in the San Joaquin Valley and the development of a web-based version of the training.

Cleaner Air: In FY2020, EPA Region 9 awarded San Joaquin Valley’s agricultural sector \$37.2 million in Diesel Emission Reduction Act and Targeted Airshed Grants to replace thousands of polluting agricultural equipment (such as tractors and harvesters) with the cleaner, lower-emitting alternatives. These funds leveraged an additional \$80 million from public and private partners, in one of the nation’s most compromised air basins and helped the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) implement their first low-dust harvester program. The program enables farmers to upgrade high-emitting harvesters with options that can reduce particulate matter emissions by at least 40%. Additionally, EPA supported San Joaquin Valley’s Technology Advancement Program in FY2020 and awarded \$500,000 to SJVAPCD to support demonstration of utilizing chipped agricultural organic waste for soil incorporation.



US EPA Region 9 Agriculture Advisor, Amy Miller and senior leaders from USDA-NRCS CA and California Department of Food and Agriculture meet with growers at the Central Coast Healthy Soils Dialogue in February 2020.

REGION 10: PACIFIC NORTHWEST

“Pacific Northwest agricultural producers are at the forefront of caring for our land, air, and water resources. We continue to believe that collaboration with our state and federal partners, conservation districts, and agricultural producers is the best path forward to promoting environmental stewardship, a sustainable agriculture industry, and protecting valuable natural resources.”

– Region 10 Administrator Chris Hladick

Supporting Partnerships, Collaboration, and Innovation in Puget Sound Agricultural Lands: EPA’s Puget Sound National Estuary Program has been instrumental in supporting the critical, on-the-ground that Puget Sound conservation districts do with agricultural landowners throughout the enormous watershed. With the support of EPA funds, the districts have worked with landowners to develop farm plans, provide technical assistance, and implement myriad BMPs such as building fences to keep animals out of waterways or creating protected heavy use and manure storage areas. To improve water quality, CDs are partnering with state Extension offices to hold horse-keeping and pasture management workshops, and to provide livestock owners with the equipment, technical assistance, and funding needed to remove barriers to implementation of BMPs. EPA Puget Sound funds have enabled agricultural landowners to voluntarily protect thousands of acres of riparian habitat.



Region 10 Administrator Chris Hladick at Twinbrook Dairy in 2018.

Region 10 FIFRA Program and Enforcement: In 2020, Region 10 completed more compliance assistance inspections than any other region, this despite adding a significant focus on response to SARS-CoV-2 to our program’s work. In particular, EPA and state FIFRA enforcement staff have conducted many compliance assistance inspections focused on unregistered pesticides marketed for disinfectant use against SARS-CoV-2. Our enforcement response is focused on ensuring the protection of farmworkers and eliminating illegal uses of registered pesticides, especially as possible disinfectants against SARS-CoV-2.



Progress for a Stronger Future

