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PennFuture offers help to Lancaster County farmers after tests show dangerous pollution in streams

(Harrisburg, PA - June 8, 2010) – Citizens for Pennsylvania’s Future (PennFuture) recently offered nearly 50 Lancaster County farmers assistance in evaluating how their farms may be contributing to water pollution in local streams and help to develop plans to meet their state and federal clean water obligations. PennFuture invited the farmers to informational meetings and a luncheon on Wednesday, June 30, 2010 at the Bart Township Building to hear more about the assistance offered.

“Our recent studies show that both Nickel Mines Run and Meetinghouse Creek have significant and dangerous water pollution often connected to farming,” said Kimberly Snell-Zarcone, PennFuture’s Agricultural and Water Policy Analyst. “We could have sent a 60 - day notice letter in order to sue all of these facilities, but we chose instead to help them identify what they need to do to comply with the law. This is also a warning that they must fix any pollution they may be causing before the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Lancaster County Conservation District take legal action.

“Water quality standards are becoming stricter and enforcement is being increased as our region works to protect the Chesapeake Bay,” continued Snell-Zarcone. “But we need healthy and clean water here in central Pennsylvania too. PennFuture hopes our local farmers will take advantage of our offer to provide an independent consultant to help them evaluate whether their farming operation is meeting minimum federal and state legal requirements. We want to help keep Pennsylvania farms working and productive.”

PennFuture evaluated water quality in the Nickel Mines Run and Meetinghouse Creek watershed at 23 different locations, finding nitrate nitrogen severely elevated at 16 points, which could potentially compromise drinking water quality, and fecal coliform, evidence of manure running directly into the streams, at six points. These results indicate that farms near these streams are not implementing their required Manure Management Plans and Agriculture Erosion and Sediment Control Plans.

PennFuture is offering the farmers the services of an independent consultant to complete an on-farm assessment of agricultural operations and a written “Inventory and Evaluation of Agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) Opportunity Areas” which the farms could use to determine whether they are meeting state and federal legal requirements. More information on the process and an opportunity to schedule the assessment will be provided at the June 30 luncheon and meetings.

PennFuture is a statewide public interest membership organization that advances policies to protect and improve the state’s environment and economy. With offices in Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, West Chester, and Wilkes-Barre, PennFuture’s activities include litigating cases before regulatory bodies and in local, state and federal courts, advocating and advancing legislative action on a state and federal level, public education and assisting citizens in public advocacy.

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