



## Ohio House unanimously passes fertilizer-runoff bill

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COLUMBUS — There were plenty of jokes about shoveling manure, but the Ohio House on Tuesday unanimously approved a bill designed to address the serious issue of agricultural fertilizer runoff contributing to Lake Erie algal blooms that poisoned Toledo's water supply last summer.

Rep. Teresa Fedor (D., Toledo) told her colleagues about awakening on the morning of Aug. 2 to the warning that nearly 500,000 Toledo area residents "can't touch the water."

"It was so scary," she said. "... We're taking such a baby step on this. ... I implore you to do much, much more and take the politics out of it."

Others, however, countered that the state has to proceed carefully to protect Ohio's water while not damaging the state's No. 1 industry. In the end, all voted for House Bill 61 even as they agreed it won't have much impact on this year's algal season.

Rep. Dave Hall (R., Millersburg), one of the bill's chief sponsors, promised more bills to come addressing other culprits like failing individual septic tanks, overflowing public water treatment plants, and lawn fertilizers.

"Some people would love to have diapers on a bull cow," he said. "... Manure's not going to stop, and we're going to have to understand that we [need to] manage it in a proper way without driving the industry out of business."

The bill, with some exceptions, prohibits application of manure and most chemical fertilizers on land within Lake Erie's western basin when the ground is frozen, snow-covered, or saturated and when significant precipitation is predicted. In some cases, farmers will have to invest in facilities to store manure until it can be spread.

The bill would prohibit open-lake dumping of sediment dredged from Maumee watershed harbors and ports by 2020. It also requires monthly phosphorous monitoring by larger public water treatment plants.

House Bill 61 now heads to the Senate, which has already passed Senate Bill 1. Both bills contain similar restrictions, but critics argue the House version will be tougher to enforce. It also lacks the Senate provision allowing the rules to take effect immediately upon Gov. John Kasich's signature rather than wait the usual 90 days.

Rep. Brian Hills (R., Zanesville), a farmer, argued that agriculture "stepped up" even though it is only part of the problem.

“I’m regulating my own industry,” he said. “... I know it doesn’t go as far as some would like to see, but we all realize this is a beginning. ... It really isn’t politics to me. It’s our No. 1 industry.”

The two chambers must decide which bill to send to Mr. Kasich. Neither measure addresses the practices of large-scale livestock operations, bowing instead to the administrative rules and operating permits governing them.

“Over the last 10 to 12 years, farm organizations all over Ohio have been very conscious of the amount of [chemical] fertilizer that they put down on the ground,” Rep. Mike Sheehy (D., Oregon) said. “... Over time that amount of fertilizer has gone down, and yet at the same time the amount of phosphorous in the western basin of Lake Erie every spring has increased. Where’s it coming from?”

“I’m not here to point fingers at anybody but only to suggest that we need greater control over where the manure is deposited and how it’s treated,” he said.

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