



## **Ag Water Board & Watershed Improvement Districts**

### **Best Practice Support (BPS) Program**

#### **WIDS and Farmer Support for Best Management Practices**

The Watershed Improvement Districts provide a unique opportunity to help improve farm operations on a farmer-to-farmer basis. This Best Practice Support Program is designed to improve water quality and environmental performance. It may also help reduce the need for regulatory inspections, enforcement actions and penalties. WID's can play an important part in improving public perception of our family farmers by improving environmental performance, but they can do so much more than that. Recognizing that improving environmental performance can have benefits that extend to improving farm efficiency and profitability will help gain acceptance of BMP's in the WID community and contribute to gaining stronger support for farming in the greater community.

#### **Community Support**

The future of farming depends on the support of the community. Support from non-farmers is based on the confidence community members and leaders have in farmers serving as responsible stewards of the environment. This includes compliance with regulations intended to help protect water quality, habitat, and other environmental resources of value to the greater community. Beyond compliance, community confidence is bolstered when they observe efforts to use best farm management practices

#### **Farmer Independence**

The natural tendency of farmers is toward independence and autonomy. This strength of farmers must be balanced by the recognition that the future of the industry depends on each and every farmer operating with an understanding of the need to meet community expectations and farming regulations. The BPS program can support the need to protect individual farmer's autonomy while working to address specific concerns and improve farm operations overall. The BPS is not an enforcement program, but a means of sharing knowledge, experience and encouraging farmers to employ best management practices.

## **The Role of the Ag Water Board and the Watershed Improvement Districts**

The Watershed Improvement Districts are in a unique position to implement this program because these government entities were created by farmers to enable farmers to work together more effectively. Through elections, differences of opinions can be addressed ensuring that the WIDs will continue to represent the majority perspective of the farmer-landowners.

### **Water Quality as Primary Focus**

This program will focus on Best Management Practices related to water quality. Issues will be identified by water quality testing, 3<sup>rd</sup> party observation of farm practices that impact water quality, and by visible appearance.

### **Program Elements**

Brief description of the program elements:

#### **1. Identification of best practices**

The WIDs and AWB will determine appropriate and best practices to use as a guideline when discussion concerns with farmers. They will rely on Conservation District and NRCS practices. A referral to the Conservation District for technical assistance is an optimal outcome.

#### **2. Identification and reporting of concerns**

Issues will be identified through observations made and reported to WID board members by farmers or concerned citizens and through observations made through the various regulatory authorities. The WIDs will track reports provided through the ERTS (Environmental Response Tracking System).

#### **3. Verification of concern**

The WID will conduct a preliminary investigation to determine validity of the reported concern.

#### **4. WID Board initial response**

Each WID will identify a standard BPS response team of at least three farmers. The response team gathers information and reports back at the next board meeting. Further action is discussed on a case by case basis at the next WID meeting.

#### **5. Resolution of concern**

The WID will note and discuss these possible resolutions:

- Satisfactory response with noted improvement - document
- Satisfactory response but questionable or delayed improvements - monitor
- Unsatisfactory response - referral to appropriate regulatory authority

### **Annual Program Review**

WID presidents will report to the Ag Water Board every three months on each concern addressed and current status. The Ag Water Board will re-evaluate the program annually, modify or discontinue as appropriate.