Please take a few minutes to get up to speed on the Gulf Hypoxia issue as it relates to Indiana. As you read through the overview below, please feel free to call or email with questions or comments.

The Mississippi River Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force was created in 1997 to address issues caused by excess nutrients in the Missippi-Atchafalaya River Basin (MARB). Excess nutrients (called eutrophication) stimulate too much algae growth in a body of water. This can lead to a condition known as hypoxia. Hypoxia occurs when the excess algae removes too much oxygen from an area of water, forcing animals to move out of that area until the correct amount of oxygen is restored.

First documented in 1972, excess nutrients in the MARB have created a hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico that appears every summer and continues to increase in size. In recent years, the movement to decrease the amounts of excess nutrients from entering the water throughout the MARB has been gaining momentum. As part of these efforts, the Missippi River Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force has developed an action plan. One component of this action plan was to develop state-led nutrient reduction strategies.

The Mississippi River Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force has many members from different federal and state agencies. Indiana, for example, is participating via the Indiana State Department of Agriculture. This means that Indiana will be one of the states developing state specific nutrient reduction strategies.

As a primer for the creation of these state-specific reduction strategies, a meeting was held this week in Columbus, OH hosted by Region 5 EPA. Indiana was well represented. I attended the 3 day workshop along with a representative from Indiana Farm Bureau, the State Department of Agriculture, and IDEM. I learned how many other states are approaching the development of these strategies, and saw many helpful presentations on conservation practices, implementation strategies, and other technical information.

It is important to clarify that while this conference was geared toward agriculture, it is understood among industry, regulators, and environmentalists that agriculture is not the only contributor to the problem. We can only focus on our own industry, but we must also expect other industries to address the problem as well.

The knowledge I gained at the conference will certainly help me in my efforts to represent the interests of Indiana's Pork Producers throughout the development of this document. While I was grateful for the information, the meeting also raised some concerns.

Agriculture will certainly be at the table for the development of these strategies in Indiana. Unfortunately, this is not the case in every state. In an audience of mostly regulators and academics, the actual agriculture *industry* was not well represented. The perspectives I gained from the regulators who attended were certainly valuable to understand (whether or not I agreed with them) but I was disappointed that there weren't more representatives from the agriculture industry receiving the same information. Our industry cannot sit passively by while regulators create these strategies unilaterally. Agriculture should be a willing, aggressive participant in *every* state.

I was also concerned by the tone of several presentations. At a conference predicated on the notion of aiding the states in the formulation of a set of voluntary nutrient reduction strategies, at least five presenters discussed mostly regulatory initiatives. One presenter in particular made it very clear that regulation was the only viable alternative in the effort to reduce nutrients; be glad he was not from our state.

Regulation for the purpose of combating nutrient loss is a dangerous proposition. The ways excess nutrients end up in our water are too numerous to count. In agriculture, we are not dealing with one drainage pipe from one manufacturing facility; we are dealing with enumerable types of farms, tillage practices, drainage patterns, soil types, etc. Putting a set of regulations on the books that governs the infinite combination of situations that might arise on any given farm would be impossible.

The beauty of the voluntary nutrient reduction strategy concept is that it could be tailored not only to each individual, but to each farm of each individual. Regulation can work where there is consistency and similarity, but there is nothing universally applicable about this issue. A repository of options for reducing nutrients needs to be created and disseminated across the state so that it can be tailored to each willing participant.

Since regulation cannot be effective in this scenario, we must do what we can to make a voluntary initiative achieve significant nutrient reductions in our state. That means all farmers need to get on board. From an industry perspective, this is the only approach that can work, so it is up to us to prove to the regulators that we can do our part with no outside intervention.

I wanted to send this out to you all to provide some background on this issue. As we begin to actively work on Gulf Hypoxia in our state, I want INPAC to be up to speed as we move forward. All of you undoubtedly share my regulatory concerns, so you will also understand why we are taking the development of these nutrient strategies very seriously on your behalf.

Thanks,

Josh Trenary
Director of Business Development
Indiana Pork