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Mississippi River Collaborative Offers Principles to Shape Minnesota Agricultural Pollution Plan

(CHAMPAIGN, IL--) In a letter to Minnesota's Commissioner of Agriculture, members of the Mississippi River Collaborative offer 11 guiding principles essential to the state's plan for reducing farm pollution impacts.

Minnesota is considering piloting a state agricultural water quality certification program where agricultural businesses, in exchange for implementing measures to reduce pollution to streams and lakes, would receive a state certification intended to shield them from regulation related to water quality standards. The Mississippi River Collaborative, a partnership of environmental organizations and legal centers from states bordering the Mississippi River, calls on the Minnesota program to establish a strong and adaptable structure that keeps the focus on water quality improvements while calling on farmers to do their share to clean up the state's waters.

The Mississippi River Collaborative's guiding principles include setting goals, requiring measurable improvements in water quality, the establishment of clean water standards, farmer accountability, and a whole farm approach. The accompanying letter stresses that relying on voluntary measures funded by taxpayer dollars has fallen short in reducing pollution from farm businesses and resulted in "patchwork conservation."

"Agriculture should not get a free pass on pollution," said Dr. Stacy James, Water Resources Scientist with Illinois' Prairie Rivers Network. "Proven strategies exist for keeping pollution out of rivers and streams, but relying on voluntary programs to implement them has yet to produce adequate results. We fear that the Minnesota effort will be yet another voluntary effort, so these principles are focused on creating a program that gets results."

Members of the Mississippi River Collaborative representing states downstream from Minnesota weighed in with Minnesota because its developing program offers hope to help achieve cleaner waters in agricultural landscapes. The groups want the program to set and reach clean water goals, especially if it is used as a model for other states.

Agricultural pollution consisting primarily of nitrogen and phosphorus fuels the growth of algae in waters which disrupts aquatic food chains, depletes oxygen, and poses a public health risk. Streams and lakes throughout Minnesota and the nation suffer from pollution-fueled green slime and its effects. Downstream, one finds the nation's most famous farm pollution disaster - the perennial Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico where thousands of square miles of the ocean are unable to support aquatic life each summer.

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*The **Mississippi River Collaborative** is a partnership of environmental organizations and legal centers from states bordering the Mississippi River as well as regional and national groups working on issues affecting the Mississippi River and its tributaries. The Collaborative harnesses the resources and expertise of its diverse organizations to comprehensively reduce pollution entering the Mississippi River as well as the Gulf of Mexico. www.msrivercollab.org*