

PERCEPTION OF AGRICULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS

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Agriculturalists (farmers and ranchers) have long engaged with government and society to feed the population, protect the environment and assure the economic viability of agriculture. As agriculturalists have become more efficient and effective in their production of food and fiber, fewer people work in the agriculture on which we all rely. Few people live in agricultural settings and fewer still are directly involved with agricultural production. As direct experience with agriculture declines, public awareness of agriculture, including new techniques, new varieties, new pests and diseases, and growing economic pressures, also declines. Societally, there is a fundamental disconnect between what people eat and their understanding of how those foods are produced. Agriculturalists are not effectively communicating how they operate, the regulatory programs with which they comply and the economic pressures they face.

Best Management Practices (BMP) manuals adopted by rule in the State of Florida are an example of a program developed by government and agriculturalists to help protect water quality, an essential component of the environment and every agricultural operation. Public perception of agriculturalists' compliance with BMPs and the experience of agriculturalists with implementing BMP's are incongruent. BMP's are practices that agriculturalists implement on farm and ranch that are economically viable and technically feasible methods to reduce the movement of excess nutrients into waters. Agricultural BMPs cannot be the sole solution for addressing water quality, because they are not the sole source of nutrients that can cause harmful algal blooms. BMPs are only one component of a broad suite of practices and infrastructure needed to protect and restore water quality. We must invest in sound science to analyze and revise BMPs based on changes in agricultural practices and embrace new technology. Water quality protection requires broad based problem solving efforts and cannot be limited to a single population or industry.

PRESENTER BIO: Katherine English, a partner with Pavese Law Firm, has 25 years' experience in agricultural law and environmental permitting. She and her family farm citrus and cattle on property owned by them for more than 130 years. She is founding chair of the American Farm Bureau Federation's Water Issue Advisory Committee.