

News Release from the Maryland Department of Agriculture

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CONTACT: Sue duPont
410-841-5889
Julie Oberg
410-841-5888

Statement from Agriculture Secretary Buddy Hance on New Initiatives and Revised Regulations to Help Farmers with Environmental Requirements and Storm Clean-up

ANNAPOLIS, MD (March 11, 2010) – “Governor Martin O’Malley announced yesterday a number of new initiatives to help farmers meet environmental requirements and recover from the historic snow storms in February. The announcement followed a meeting on Monday with the Eastern Shore Delegation, Governor O’Malley, Environment Secretary Shari T. Wilson and me.

I am pleased to provide more information about these important new developments and thank Governor O’Malley for his leadership in moving these solutions forward for the benefit of the farmers, the agricultural economy and the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Thanks also to the members of the Eastern Shore Delegation for their time, candor and flexibility in seeking solutions that will work.

Regarding storm clean up, Secretary Wilson has extended the deadline for the burning of poultry houses, other livestock shelters and manure storage structures that suffered structural collapse during the heavy snowstorms of February 2010, subject to conditions that protect the environment and public health. The new deadline is April 18. I urge all farmers and poultry companies who need to clear storm-related debris to get their permits and get this work done by April 18 as it is extremely unlikely that another extension will be considered. Storm recovery resources, including guidelines for burning, are on the MDA website at www.mda.state.md.us

The “rapid response teams” that MDA is leading are a result of the Eastern Shore Delegation’s concern about new regulations the Department of the Environment (MDE) is implementing based on new federal standards for large animal operations. These teams will quickly focus existing resources on evaluating and resolving possible on-farm environmental issues. This will benefit farmers who are confronted with the uncertainty associated with the delays that sometimes happen between the time a possible environmental issue is brought to light and the time of environmental sampling, reporting of results and taking action to resolve the issue if one is determined to exist. These teams reinforce the existing MDA-MDE partnership to jointly respond to water quality complaints on farms. Regional MDA staff will be available to address water quality concerns related agricultural operations and situations that have potential environmental impact. MDA will lead the response team, visiting the site, evaluating conditions and making initial determinations. Local soil conservation districts will be available to provide additional

technical assistance where a problem is identified. Financial assistance may be available to help offset the cost to the farmer of installing best management practices needed to address problems.

Maryland is the first State in the country to have final, EPA-approved New Source Performance Standards for poultry operations that are concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), which allow new construction to proceed under assurance farmers will be in compliance with EPA standards. MDA and MDE worked closely with farmers on these new requirements. Because of the time it has taken to approve the final new source poultry operation guidelines, MDA will see that new poultry operations take first priority in obtaining technical assistance to prepare Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP) that are required by the new Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations Permit. In addition, to assist all farmers who are required to obtain CNMPs, MDA has secured commitments from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to increase the level of technical assistance available with three additional staff members to develop these plans statewide. Additionally, more than 30 Maryland Soil Conservation District staff will be cross trained to assist with plan development."