

FOREWORD

As Commissioner of Agriculture, I believe that farming in West Virginia is not only an important contributor to our economy, but also adds to the natural beauty and heritage of the Mountain State. I have been farming for more than half a century at my home in Mason County, and can assure you that it can be difficult work. Decisions made can affect the future of farmland for generations, so adequate research and exploration must occur prior to changing any aspect of farming operations.

This report is the ongoing work of the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) in response to concerns about water quality that arose because of the mid 1990s expansion of poultry production in the Potomac Headwaters region. A short-term study by the USGS during that period indicated that some streams were contaminated with fecal coliform bacteria and, as a result, seven Potomac Highland streams were listed by the WVDEP as being impaired. Agriculture was named the prime suspect. Out of concern that the listing of these waters was based on insufficient data, I directed the WVDA to collect additional data that would more accurately establish the condition of these streams.

This report details the findings of the WVDA's water quality sampling efforts from July 1998 to June 2004 along the Potomac headwaters of West Virginia. The discussion focuses on the water quality program's origin, the geography and economics of the sampling area, and the data findings watershed by watershed. In an effort to continue to preserve our resources, the WVDA strives to promote farming while encouraging and supporting the implementation of Best Management Practices.

Thanks to the pioneering spirit and cooperation of landowners and state and federal agencies, we are continuing to make considerable progress in tracking and controlling potential contamination in the Potomac River Basin. With the preliminary success of the program in the Eastern Panhandle, it is being considered as a model for other states, in addition to being used to answer water quality questions in other areas of the Mountain State.

For more information about this and other WVDA programs, please contact me at (304) 558-2201, or by e-mail at douglass@ag.state.wv.us.



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