Lessons from Maine: Food, Farms and Forever Chemicals

The Harmful Legacy and Ongoing Challenge of PFAS and Agriculture

May 18, 2022
All attendees are muted during the webinar

Ask questions by clicking "Q&A" in the menu bar and typing in the box that appears.
Webinar Speakers

- Sarah Alexander, Executive Director, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
- Ellen Stern Griswold, Vice President and Deputy Director, Maine Farmland Trust
- Bill Pluecker, Farmer and Maine State Representative, Member, Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
- Sarah Woodbury, Director of Advocacy, Defend Our Health
- Sharon Anglin Treat, Senior Attorney, Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy (Moderator)
Program Details

- Brief overview of PFAS characteristics, sources and health impacts
- Initial discovery of PFAS contamination of farmland, feed, livestock and farm products in Maine, role of Defend Our Health
- Current status of statewide agriculture-focused PFAS investigation, soil and water testing, and agricultural research
- Big gaps in federal environmental and farm policies and programs
- Maine Farmland Trust and Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners respond with farmer assistance fund, in coordination with State programs
- Legislative response to PFAS crisis – water standards, right to sue, “turning off the tap,” ban on land spreading sludge & compost (“biosolids”), pesticide regulations, farmer safety net and assistance, research
- What comes next? State implementation, needed Federal action
Background information on “Forever Chemicals” – Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances

- **Ubiquitous** in consumer, health, agricultural and other products & in manufacturing processes
- **Too many to count** -- 9,000 PFAS versions in the class -- and counting
- **Incredibly persistent** – highly stable, do not break down quickly in environment and can last decades and even centuries
- **Highly mobile** – can travel far from source of contamination in both water and deposition from air transport, showing up in remote areas including Arctic
- **Bioaccumulative** – move up the food chain, and can increase in concentration
- **Toxic** –and toxic to reproduction
- **Health impacts serious** – weakened immune response; cancers including testicular, prostate, & kidney; reduced fertility; obesity risk; developmental delays in children
- **Bad actors old and new** - characteristics not limited to older “legacy” long-chain PFAS (PFOA, PFOS) – short-chain PFAS are even more mobile than the chemicals they replaced and can break down into precursor chemicals for long-chain PFAS
For more information:

Sharon Anglin Treat
@sharontreat
streat@iatp.org
(207)242-8558
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Understanding and Addressing the Harmful Legacy and Ongoing Challenge of PFAS and Agriculture

Ellen Griswold, Vice President & Deputy Director, MAINE FARMLAND TRUST
Sarah Woodbury, Director of Advocacy, DEFEND OUR HEALTH
Sarah Alexander, Executive Director, MAINE ORGANIC FARMERS & GARDENERS ASSOCIATION
Fred & Laura Stone, Stoneridge Farm

Third-generation dairy farmers in Arundel, Maine

First farm where high levels of PFAS were discovered

Spoke out in 2019

Financially ruined, out of business, health jeopardized
PFAS on Farms Drives Maine Policy Action

2019 – State-testing revealed 95% of wastewater sludge with high PFAS
● Sludge spreading on farmland reduced, but loopholes remain
2020 – Governor’s PFAS Task Force recommends multiple actions
2021 – LD 1600 requires investigation of all sludge-spreading sites:
● Sludge was spread on about 700 sites over more than 40 years
● All soil and groundwater testing must be completed by 2025
2021 – Governor allocates $30 million for PFAS investigation & clean-up
2021 – LD 1503 - requires phase-out of all non-essential uses of PFAS by 2030.
2021 - LD 129 - Sets standards for 6 PFAS in drinking water. One of the strongest in the nation
MAP: Land and Water Resources at Risk

Map DEP Permit Sites
An organic vegetable and grain farm operated in Unity, Maine since 2014.

PFAS-laced wastewater sludge was spread on their farm fields decades earlier.
MFT and MOFGA Support Services for Impacted Farms

- PFAS Emergency Relief Fund
- Technical Assistance
- Research Support
MFT and MOFGA Support Services for Impacted Farms

• Exploration of Solar Opportunities

• Advocating with the State

• Assisting with Easements
PFAS farmland crisis spurs 2022 action

- LD 1911 prohibits all land application of sludge & sludge-derived compost
- Maine allocated $60 million to support impacted farmers and PFAS research
- LD 1875 requires the state to come up with a plan to treat landfill leachate for PFAS
- LD 2019 phases out the roughly 1600 Maine-registered pesticide products containing PFAS by 2030
What Comes Next

• Coordinated Research Agenda
  • Farm Management Research
  • Soil Remediation Research
• Intersection with Solar Siting
• Farm Buy-Outs
• Federal Advocacy
National Problem Needing a Federal Response

- Environmental Working Group: PFAS could be contaminating 5% of all cropland or 20 million acres in the United States.

- Sludge spreading programs have been approved in all 50 states.

- EPA only agreed to complete risk assessment for PFOA/PFOS in sludge by Winter 2024.
National Problem Needing a Federal Response

• Needed FDA Actions:
  • More stringent testing for PFAS in food supply
  • Setting federal action thresholds for PFAS in food products
  • Make PFAS contamination in food a research priority

• Needed EPA Actions:
  • Regulate PFAS as a class
  • Classify PFAS as hazardous substances to allow CERCLA laws to apply
  • Set action thresholds for PFAS in drinking water and biosolids
  • Make PFAS contamination from biosolids a research priority
National Problem Needing a Federal Response

- Congressional Response Needed:
  - Pass the Keep Food Containers Safe from PFAS Act (S. 3169/HR 6026)
  - Pass the No PFAS in Cosmetics Act (S. 2047/HR 3990)
  - Pass the PFAS Firefighter Protection Act (S. 4076/HR 7597)
  - Provide funding to states for:
    - Providing resources to impacted communities (farmers, well owners)
    - Remediation costs
    - Funding to help municipalities deal with increased costs due to PFAS contamination.
National Problem Needing a Federal Response

- Needed USDA Actions:
  - Develop income replacement programs beyond Dairy Indemnity Payment Program (DIPP)
  - Expand the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
  - Create greater Farm Service Agency loan flexibility
  - Make PFAS-related research a priority for USDA research programs
  - Explore federal support for state buy-back programs