

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

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March 30, 2018

Pamela Bush
Secretary and Assistant General Counsel
Delaware River Basin Commission
P.O. Box 7360
West Trenton, NJ 08628

Dear Ms. Bush:

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB) is pleased to offer its comments on proposed regulations from the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) regarding hydraulic fracturing activities in the Delaware River Basin. PFB is a general farm organization, made up of more than 62,000 members. Since 1950, PFB has provided support, advocacy and informational and professional services for Pennsylvania agriculture and farm families, including those who are in Pennsylvania's portion of the Delaware River Basin. On behalf of those farmers and our members across the Commonwealth, we write to oppose the proposed regulations and urge their immediate withdrawal.

To better understand our perspective, some background information on the state of the current agricultural economy is in order. Many Pennsylvania farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to make a living, and a significant number of those would be out of business entirely if not for the natural gas drilling industry. Because of the revenues farmers have obtained via natural gas drilling on their land, they have had the opportunity to buy equipment that they otherwise would not have been able to update. They have been able to install best management practices to improve the environment that they would not have otherwise been able to implement. And perhaps most importantly, younger members of farm families have been able to seriously consider staying home and continuing the family business, rather than leaving for job opportunities elsewhere. On many levels, agriculture has been improved because of the gas industry, and PFB would like to see farmers in the Delaware River Basin have the same opportunities that farmers in other parts of Pennsylvania have been able to enjoy.

To be sure, the agricultural economy has not been the only beneficiary of natural gas drilling in Pennsylvania. Local residents employed directly by the natural gas industry have developed tremendously successful careers that have enabled them to raise expanding families, purchase homes, and in some cases, provide for a secondary source of income. At the same time, local infrastructure has changed drastically for the better, as roads are now in the best condition in memory because the gas industry repairs, rebuilds and maintains many local roadways. Numerous local businesses have grown and hired more workers, including gas stations, restaurants, home builders, and other operations.

Regarding environmental quality, farmers have personally participated in much of the conservation activity and infrastructure development taking place on their farms related to the natural gas industry, much of which is rather unobtrusive and has operated virtually without incident. Also, despite sensationalized accounts of what has allegedly happened to water quality in areas where fracking has taken place, longtime residents report that water quality is much the same as it ever was. Water testing and monitoring are constantly taking place to ensure clean and safe water. Farmers need and want clean water and undertake significant expenditures to protect it, and current regulations are adequate to that task.

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As mentioned previously, PFB appreciates the attitude that other regions of the state have shown toward natural gas drilling. Reliable, affordable supplies of food and fuel must be available to sustain our nation's strength, and this is an opportunity for the farmer to help provide the fuel and the food that our Commonwealth and our country need to thrive. Our desire is to support farmers and other local landowners who may be involved in the natural gas industry in the Delaware River Basin and ensure that they have the same opportunity that their neighbors in the Susquehanna River Basin and elsewhere in Pennsylvania are enjoying. In fact, while farmers in the Susquehanna River Basin report that there was initially a great deal of fear of the unknown when natural gas drilling started, that fear was driven by emotional hysteria and misinformation, not facts—and that fear quickly subsided once residents understood the reality of the situation.

Natural gas drilling is a source of “passive revenue” to farmers. Natural gas royalties increase revenues to farmers without an additional investment of time, which gives farmers more time to spend on their farms. Across Pennsylvania and the United States as a whole, the age of the average farmer continues to increase, as younger generations have already left the farm because it has not been economically viable for them to stay there. For those older farmers that remain, natural gas revenues create some options—to expand beef cattle herds as the dairy economy continues to struggle; to upgrade equipment, which often leads to the installation of better best management practices for environmental improvement; and finally, to simply be able to stay on their farms when they otherwise might not have been able to do so.

In the end, natural gas drilling increases personal liberty. It allows people greater control of their lives and enhances their ability to improve the lives of their families. It provides benefits to the entire community, not simply to those directly involved in the natural gas industry—indeed, it has led to environmental and other improvements that would be extremely difficult to attain in its absence. Every affected Pennsylvania family should have the opportunity to say yes or no to the natural gas industry, and to deny any of those families that choice is incompatible with the principles of a free society.

Once again, we urge the immediate withdrawal of these draft regulations and strongly suggest that the DRBC follow the successful examples of other parts of Pennsylvania that have managed to encourage the responsible development of the natural gas drilling industry while enjoying increased economic prosperity, improving infrastructure, continuing vigilant environmental stewardship, and protecting the property rights and individual liberty of affected landowners. Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective.

Sincerely,



Grant R. Gulibon
Director, Regulatory Affairs