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# Western Lake Erie gets $19M to trim algae-forming runoff

## Federal grants to promote lower phosphorus use by farmers

By Tom Henry, Toledo Blade

The western Lake Erie region is getting more than $19 million in federal grant money to help farmers reduce algae-forming runoff in northwest Ohio, northeast Indiana, and southeast Michigan.

The grants are among $370 million nationally announced Wednesday by U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack as part of the 2014 Farm Bill’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program, an effort that promotes better land use and water quality through regional cooperation.

Also on Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Bob Latta (R., Bowling Green) reintroduced a bill that calls for a deeper understanding of what causes and what cures harmful Great Lakes algal blooms.

Ohio is receiving more than $27 million of the $370 million allocated under the Farm Bill — about 7 percent — for conservation projects statewide.

Much of that will be used for the Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin Phosphorus Reduction Initiative it co-launched with Michigan and Indiana.

The projects “will help reduce harmful algal blooms and ensure the safety of Ohio’s drinking water and the strength of our economy,” U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D., Ohio) said.

The new grants supplement $3 million previously announced for an incentive-based conservation program for Ohio farmers.

Some 115 projects were funded nationally. They are expected to leverage nearly $400 million in additional funds from participants, the federal agriculture department said.

“State Farm Bureaus in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan have been cooperating with state governments, environmental organizations, and other groups to secure money from the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program,” Joe Cornely, “Ohio Farm Bureau Federation spokesman, said. Farmers are serious about their role in improving water quality, and these new conservation resources will be of significant help.”

Todd Ambs, campaign director for the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, which represents dozens of Great Lakes environmental, conservation, and outdoor organizations, zoos, aquariums, and museums, said last summer’s Toledo water crisis — which temporarily made tap water unsafe for nearly 500,000 people — has “underscored the urgency of this issue.”

“These projects will reduce sediment and nutrient buildup, produce results that can be replicated in other parts of the Great Lakes, and move us closer to the goal of waters that are always safe for drinking, swimming, and fishing,” Mr. Ambs said.

The bill reintroduced by Mr. Latta is called the Great Lakes & Fresh Water Algal Blooms Information Act. It would create a central database to help Great Lakes scientists exchange information about water quality, his office said.