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FIGHTING RUNOFF--SUCCESS IN THE NEUSE RIVER BASIN
RESULTS ANNOUNCED AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Asheville, North Carolina--Final results from the Center for Agricultural Partnerships' Neuse Crop Management Project were announced at the Center's *Working Landscapes and Water Quality: National Challenges-Local Solutions* recent seminar in Washington, D.C. This groundbreaking project recruited more than 1,000 North Carolinian farmers who adopted sustainable agricultural practices and learned how to apply less nitrogen and herbicides and reduce runoff from their farms. The result is an annual reduction of more than one million pounds of nitrogen use on agricultural lands surrounding the Neuse River Basin that will protect the water in the Neuse River Basin and also meet the state mandated nitrogen reduction requirements a year ahead of schedule.

"It has taken a great many partners, who have worked together through floods and challenges to meet our goal; this was tough. But our shared vision of improving the water quality in the Neuse River has produced results. We are delighted with the success of the Neuse Crop Management Project," said Deanna L. Osmond, the project coordinator.

The project's final results include:
-Nutrient plans being developed for more than 105,000 acres of cropland.
-A 23 percent reduction in the application of fertilizer nitrogen per acre. (from 87 lbs per acre to 67 lbs per acre).
-More than 40 percent reduction in soil-applied preemergence herbicides.

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The Neuse Crop Management Project started in 1998 to bridge the gap in commercial agriculture between research and implementation. Extension staff, commodity suppliers and crop consultants were recruited to work directly with farmers to change their nitrogen management practices. Initially, four demonstration farms in Franklin/Wake, Wayne, Lenoir, and Craven counties, that provide realistic examples of typical farms throughout the basin were used as models for farmers. At these farms, nitrogen management plans were developed and best management practices (BMPs) -- nutrient management, controlled drainage, and riparian buffers were implemented to enable farmers to meet the Neuse Agricultural Rule requirements. This project complemented the basin wide education program provided by the Neuse Education Team. Project partners were farmers, agribusiness, crop consultants, university research, and extension personnel.

Jim Parrott, owner of the 250 year old Parrott Farms in Kinston, North Carolina, said, "I wanted to be involved in this project because it provided useful practical information about how to analyze soil types which in turn enabled us to use fertilizers efficiently. It made good common sense, helped us with our bottom line and made us better stewards of our farms and the environment. This project gave us planning tools and professional help to reduce nitrogen and improve the water quality in the Neuse. We want to stay in farming, be profitable and protect the environment, this project helps me do that."

North Carolina's Neuse River Basin drains 1.2 million acres in central and eastern North Carolina, including rapidly growing metropolitan areas, productive farmland, and extensive forests. The Neuse River Estuary has experienced harmful algae blooms and fish kills over the past two decades, resulting in state regulations mandating 30% reductions in annual nitrogen loading from all sources by 2003. Agricultural land uses throughout the river basin are estimated to contribute more than half of the total nitrogen load to the estuary.

The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service based at North Carolina State University initiated a comprehensive education program for the Neuse River Basin in 1996 to promote adoption of water quality protection measures in agricultural and urban areas. The Neuse Crop Management Project was initiated with the goal of increasing the use of production practices that improve the economic, agronomic, and environmental performance of corn/cotton/wheat/soybean producers in the Neuse River Basin.

The Neuse Crop Management Project has accomplished its goal of enabling farmers to improve water quality, effectively deal with public and regulatory concerns, and sustain their economic viability. Specific accomplishments of the comprehensive education and research effort include:

- More than 1 million pounds of reduced annual nitrogen export from agricultural lands due to BMP implementation (representing greater than 30% reduction over baseline);

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- More than 115,000 acres of farmland treated with agricultural BMPs;
- More than 1,000 producers trained in nutrient management principles;
- More than 500,000 citizens aware of agricultural efforts to improve water quality in the Neuse River Basin.
- Developing a computer program to design nitrogen management plans for individual farms.
- Designing a basin-wide method for measuring nitrogen loss.

"This project will be a blueprint for ways to improve water quality by modifying commercial agricultural practices. We can use this model to save our nation's rivers and waterways in different geographic areas and crops," said Larry Elworth, executive director of the Center for Agricultural Partnerships.

The Center for Agricultural Partnerships is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to create programs that solve agricultural problems by helping farmers adopt more environmentally sound and profitable practices CAP's programs improve the productivity and viability of farming operations as well as the well being of farm communities, build healthier ecosystems, reduce pesticide risk, and improve water quality in growing regions across the country.

In the last six years CAP has worked with partners involved in the commercial production of lettuce, celery, apples, pears, cotton, soybeans, walnuts, corn, and peanuts. CAP projects in California, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington successfully implement innovations that improve agriculture's impact on our natural resources.

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