



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY
2105 FIRST AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404 USA

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Jim Kleinschmit, 612-870-3430, jim@iatp.org
Ben Lilliston, 202-223-3740, blilliston@iatp.org

Agriculture to Play Key Role in Governors New Great Lakes Plan

Water Quantity Issues Critical for Farmers

Minneapolis – A new plan by the Great Lakes Governors and two Canadian provinces to improve the management and protection of the Great Lakes will benefit farmers and safeguard a critical agricultural resource, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) will testify at a public hearing in St. Paul later today.

During the last three years, the eight Great Lakes states and Canada have worked on developing agreements to govern new water withdrawals, diversions and conservation throughout the Great Lakes basin. Protecting Great Lakes water has become a high-profile issue because of increasing demands within and near the basin as well as proposals to divert water to other regions and countries. Proposed bottling plants and excessive urban water consumption have also threatened the available quantity of water in regions of the basin.

“These Great Lakes agreements are particularly important for farmers, who directly rely on water for their livelihood,” said Jim Kleinschmit, IATP’s Great Lakes project director. “Agriculture within the basin is high value and diverse, largely due to the water resources and favorable climate. Protecting the Great Lakes will protect Great Lakes farming. Furthermore, much of the basin’s rural economy depends on agriculture and food processing – two industries that absolutely depend on the availability of plentiful, clean water. These agreements help ensure that these industries will remain viable in the basin for generations to come.”

The agriculture community has great potential to help improve water quality and conservation, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, regional culture, and landscape protection in the region. IATP has issued a new background on what the Great Lakes water agreement will mean for farmers in the region and proposes a number of actions and incentives to help farmers meet the goals of the Great Lakes agreement. That background, *Waters in Common*, can be found at: www.iatp.org.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Great Lakes Governors are hosting a public information hearing in St. Paul today seeking public comment on the agreements. The public comment period lasts through October 18.

“We feel the public comment period needs to be extended,” said Kleinschmit. “Farmers are in the fields right now and we have a hotly contested election season, especially within the basin states – this critically important Great Lakes plan just isn’t on the radar screen for many people. The worst scenario is that they finalize the plan with minimal public input, and the larger Great Lakes community is caught by surprise during the approval process.”

After the agreements are finalized, they will have to be approved by the legislatures of all eight states and the U.S. Congress before going into force. The actual agreements can be viewed on the Council of Great Lakes Governors’ web site: www.cglg.org.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.