In the last twenty yrs, government regulation of industrial pollution has improved water quality, but this nation cannot make further environmental progress without tackling agricultural pollution. More people are realizing that farmers rely on environmentally-threatening technologies, but do not bear the same share of responsibility as other polluters. Nowhere is this mounting concern over agricultural pollution better reflected than in the Congressional debate over reauthorization of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Concern over agricultural pollution is also growing outside government. Farmers, producer groups and those doing business with farmers are troubled by expanding standards of legal accountability for agricultural pollution.

In addressing these concerns, everyone from lawmakers to landowners is facing challenges not encountered in regulating industrial pollution. Government officials are realizing that pollution from the nation’s two million farms will not be solved by a regulatory or permit program cut from a traditional mold. On the private side, farmers and other groups are searching for management tools to contend with new risks and responsibilities. Site-specific management will form the cornerstone of public programs, as well as private initiatives, designed to respond to the special demands of agricultural pollution. With the expanding use of site-specific management, however, landowners in particular will find themselves in a position once faced by industries using environmental audits. Gathering information to make management decisions, they run the risk of discovering potentially incriminating information and facing difficult questions about access to and use of assessment information.