



AGRICULTURAL Water Use Regulations & Exemptions



The Commission's Mission

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission's responsibility is to balance economic development with the conservation of aquatic ecosystems by managing the basin's water resources in a sustainable manner. The Susquehanna River Basin Compact, signed into law in 1970, outlines the Commission's authorities. Our regulations are in place to:

- manage surface and ground water supplies;
- avoid conflicts among water users;
- accommodate reasonable economic development;
- promote healthy aquatic habitats;
- protect public health, safety and welfare; and
- ensure adequate flows to the Chesapeake Bay.



Regulations

The waters of the Susquehanna River Basin are used for many purposes – domestic, municipal, agricultural, commercial, industrial, energy, environmental and recreational. To balance these competing needs, the Commission regulates water withdrawals of 100,000 gallons per day (gpd) or more over a consecutive 30-day average from any source or combination of sources within the basin.

All agricultural activities are subject to this regulatory threshold. Individual farms reaching this withdrawal threshold must apply for Commission approval and abide by monitoring requirements.





Consumptive Water Use

The Commission also regulates the consumptive use of water in excess of 20,000 gpd or more over a 30-day average from any water source or combination of sources. Consumptive use (CU) is water that is used and not returned to the basin. This may be due to a variety of processes including evaporation, transpiration due to irrigation, incorporation into manufactured products or injection underground. In addition to issuing approvals for CU, Commission regulations also require that the impacts of the water loss to the resources of the basin are mitigated during periods of low flow.



Exemptions



CU for agricultural purposes is not currently subject to review or approval by the Commission. Because of the importance and need for the life sustaining commodities produced by agricultural operations, the Commission's member states have elected to provide financial and operational resources to support drought mitigation for agricultural water use within the basin and relieve individual farms from that obligation.

Agricultural water use is defined as water use associated primarily with the raising of food or forage crops, trees, flowers, shrubs, turf, aquaculture and livestock. Water use associated with the processing of crops (washing, preparation, etc.) is not considered to be an agricultural consumptive use but rather an industrial food processing consumptive use, which is subject to Commission review, approval and mitigation.

A good example of this distinction can be found with tomato products. The water used to irrigate the crop in the field is considered to be an agricultural CU, while the water used to process the harvested tomato into various juice or sauce products (even if taking place on the farm lot itself) is considered to be an industrial CU.