

A recently released Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report [jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt497.pdf] ignores Chesapeake Bay nutrient pollution caused by disposing of municipal sewage sludge (dubbed “biosolids” by those who wish to disguise its real nature) by land application.

According to EPA, at least a quarter of Bay nitrogen pollution is caused by the disposal of animal waste [poultry litter, manure and sewage sludge] by land application in the guise of “free fertilizer.” Sludge disposal in VA is nitrogen-based and assumes that 30 percent of the applied Nitrogen is available to the succeeding crop. Most of the rest of the Nitrogen ends up in the water along with a lot of phosphorus.

The JLARC report claims, wrongly, that the “risk of water contamination from biosolids application is generally very low.” The report touts financial benefits for a very few farmers and completely ignores the cost to society of bay nutrient pollution from things like the degraded commercial and recreational fishery and decreased property values.

Chesapeake Bay water quality can never improve significantly until the massive pollution caused by the disposal of animal waste by land application is eliminated, the waste used for biofuel and the phosphorus recovered.

If the General Assembly accepts this report, it certifies that the profits of a very few farmers and trivially lower wastewater bills are more important than Chesapeake Bay water quality.

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