High among farmers' concerns about environmental rules is what new practices may cost, said Ronnie Anderson, president of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation.

Anderson said a farmer cannot afford to spend what large companies like Exxon or Dow Chemical have put out to meet environmental standards.

But farmers are aware that environmental concerns are becoming a part of farming, and farmers are willing to work with the Department of Environmental Quality, he said.

"There have been some suggested changes that are terribly expensive and with the data we've seen are not necessarily that effective," Anderson said.

"Before we jump off into trying to change the way farming operates there should be some real thorough study of the economic impact and ecological value that will come from some of these suggested changes," he said.

Anderson said farmers for years have been dealing with non-point source pollution — the storm runoff from fields that muddy and overfertilize streams, for example — through conservation practices.

"We've been working with the Soil Conservation Service for years in using different techniques — terracing, planting cover crops, leaving areas subject to erosion in permanent sod," he said. "I think we can probably do a better job, but we have been moving in that direction for years."

Anderson said the Farm Bureau and DEQ and other agencies have already worked together, such as devising ways rice seed soakers can dispose of their water without its going directly into streams and polluting them. Rice seed are soaked before planting to speed germination. He also cited improvements in the works to improve the way dairy farms operate.

"I think we've got a good working relationship with DEQ and we can solve a lot of these problems," he said.

Farmers want practical and affordable solutions, he said.

Agriculture foresees environmental issues will have an impact on farming in the nation, he said.

"I think it is a matter that in the next five to 10 years, we will see environmental issues being one of the key things that farmers have to face," he said. "Farmers will have to strive to find a 'happy medium' between what strict environmentalists would like to see farming do and what is economical and practical, he said.