



Farmers can avoid runoff headaches

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MADISON – A new year, and a new cropping season ahead, offers a good time for Wisconsin’s farmers to write their nutrient management plans, or if they already have plans, to review and update them, says Sara Walling.

Walling, chief of the Nutrient Management and Water Quality Section at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, says the department can help. “Our staff is available to assist agronomists and individual farmers with nutrient management planning. We also provide plenty of planning information online, we fund farmer education in many counties, and for day-to-day nutrient application decisions, we have the Runoff Risk Advisory Forecast online. Farmers can use these resources to make this the year they develop a plan. It will help their bottom line and keep them from making the kinds of headlines no one wants to see.”

Nutrient management planning is one of the best tools farmers have to avoid over-applying manure and/or commercial fertilizers to their cropland. Applying more fertilizers than needed costs farmers money. It also threatens surface water quality if runoff occurs, and it threatens groundwater quality if nutrients pass through thin soils and cracked bedrock.

A nutrient management plan is a written record of cropping practices that accounts for all sources of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, or N-P-K as these nutrients are commonly known. It takes into account soil type, sensitive landscape characteristics, slope, underlying bedrock, and crop rotation for each field on the farm.

Nutrient management plans are always a good idea, but they are also required under some circumstances. Plans – and implementation -- are required when farms:

- Fall under local manure storage, livestock siting, or other zoning ordinances
- Require a wastewater discharge permit for a large livestock operation, or CAFO
- Accept nutrient management or manure storage cost-share funds
- Receive Farmland Preservation tax credits
- Cause significant manure runoff

Upcoming Training for Nutrient Management Planning

Sessions are open to farmers in the county indicated; call phone numbers listed for further information.

Statewide – Jan. 14, Alliant Energy Center, Madison, 608-224-4606 (SnapPlus training only)

Columbia County – Jan. 28, Feb. 4, 11, 18; Portage, 608-742-9682

Green County – Feb. 6, 13, 20, 27; Monroe; 608-325-4195, ext. 121

Lafayette County – March 4; Darlington; 608-776-3836, ext. 124

Langlade County – Jan. 16, Antigo, 715-627-6292

Rock County – Feb. 10, 17, 24, March 3, 5, 12; Janesville; 608-754-6617

Sauk County – Jan. 21, Plain, 608-355-4838

Shawano County – Jan. 29, Shawano, 715-526-4632

Waukesha County – Jan. 29-30, Oconomowoc, 262-896-8306

Waupaca County – March 26-27, Waupaca, 715-258-6247

If you don’t see your county listed, please check with your land conservation department.

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT – ADD ONE

Walling says a good nutrient management plan:

- Is specific to the individual farm
- Is based on good data from soil testing and other calculations
- Meets the USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service's "590 Standard"
- Accounts for all sources of N-P-K
- Is prepared by a qualified planner – one who holds a recognized certification such as a certified crop advisor, or the farmer himself who completes a training course
- Gets reviewed annually and updated as needed

Free downloadable planning software is available online. The software, SnapPlus, was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison and DATCP. It allows farmers to plug in the data for their fields and calculate application rates.

DATCP funds farmer education programs through grants to county conservation departments, technical colleges and other organizations. These programs are free to farmers and sometimes offer financial incentives to them.

The UW and DATCP, along with several other agencies and organizations, also developed the Manure Management Advisory System, which includes an interactive online mapping program that shows farmers the 590 manure spreading restrictions for individual fields, based on slope, soil and surface waters. The system also includes the Runoff Risk Advisory Forecast, a mapping system developed with the help of the National Weather Service, which warns farmers when rainfall or snowmelt makes spreading risky.

Links to all these resources are available at http://datcp.wi.gov/Farms/Nutrient_Management. To find out if a training session is scheduled for your area, contact your county land conservation office. Contact information is at <http://datcp.wi.gov/uploads/Environment/pdf/ConservationDirectory.pdf>.

"If there is no training scheduled for your area, let your county conservation office know that you're interested. But you can also use the list on our website to find a qualified planner. Given the amount of input costs involved if you reduce commercial fertilizer use and increase fertility, it's worth the investment," Walling says.

"It's not enough to develop a nutrient management plan," she says. "You need to calibrate manure spreading equipment so you can follow the plan, and it has to work hand in hand with conservation practices that prevent soil erosion. Nutrients can run off by themselves, especially from frozen soil, but sheet or rill erosion can also carry them away. Then you've lost your money, you've lost the nutrients and productive soil and you may have polluted streams and lakes."

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