



Michigan
Agriculture
Environmental
Assurance
Program

Field Notes

Getting Started with Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs)

With production agriculture under close scrutiny by non-farm individuals are making sure they have addressed environmental risks. Developing and implementing a comprehensive nutrient management (CNMP) plan has been made easier with the guidance of the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP).

MAEAP is a voluntary, pro-active program designed to reduce producers' legal and environmental risks. It teaches effective land stewardship practices and assists producers in complying with state and federal regulations. MAEAP was developed at the request of Michigan producers as a comprehensive program to identify and prevent agricultural pollution risks on their farm.

Getting started is easy

The first step in getting started is to understand MAEAP and what is involved. Each fall and winter a series of educational sessions are conducted to familiarize producers with MAEAP. The sessions are designed to raise producer awareness of practices that reduce legal and environmental risks; discuss the environmental impact of certain historical producer practices on farms and build contacts with resources that can assist producers to help assess and reduce risks. Once a producer has attended one of the educational sessions, they are equipped with the necessary information to begin phase two, developing a comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP).

Laying the groundwork for writing a CNMP

Data collection is the first step and perhaps most critical step in developing a CNMP. Using the "Three-Fold Manure Management Data Collection Sheet," producers can compile information that provides the groundwork needed to begin writing a CNMP. At first glance the work sheet may seem a little overwhelming, but after quick review producers will see it breaks down easily into three key areas; farmstead, manure and crops.

Producers first focus on the farmstead by drawing a map of the existing area, including barns, feed lots, feed storage, manure collection and storage systems, pesticide storage, adjacent roads, and various other relevant physical features. In addition a basic description of the farm, including goals and long-term resource management is developed. Reporting what type and how many animals are on the farm, as well as the type of bedding used completes the first part of the work sheet.

Information regarding the farm's manure management is the second key set of data. With the help of the "Daily Manure Production and Characteristics" chart, producers first calculate the amount of manure produced annually on the farm, as well as the nutrients available in the manure. Some of the other topics addressed in this work sheet area include describing manure hauling procedures, land application methods, and manure storage systems.

A written plan for the upcoming cropping year is the next area producers complete. Producers report information regarding number of acres planted, potential yield, and the removal of vital nutrients by using the crop removal tables in the Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices for Manure Management and Utilization (Nutrient Removal Chart). Furthermore, this area addresses current fertilizer practices, as well as dead animal removal. The final step in completing the work sheet is to provide soil test information, including soil type, tillage and next crop.

After the initial data collection, the conservation practices need to be assessed. Farmers may have an existing conservation plan completed at the Soil Conservation District Office or one can be completed with assistance from NRCS.

Simply completing the work sheet does not constitute a CNMP. Instead the work sheet provides the foundation information necessary for writing a CNMP. The work sheet is a helpful tool to collect and organize the necessary data before enlisting the help of a certified plan writer or proceed further with CNMP development.

Where to get help

Producers who keep up-to-date records will have an easier time completing the work sheet and eventually writing a CNMP than those who do not. With the data collection work sheet filled out as completely as possible, it is time for the producer to decide if they are going to tackle writing a CNMP on his/her own or enlist the help of professionals.

Certified Crop Advisors, professional engineers as well as some private business and agricultural agencies may be certified to assist in writing and developing a CNMP.

To receive a list of those organizations or individuals providing assistance in writing a CNMP contact: Kevin Wickey with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services at (517) 324-5171

or kevin.wickey@mi.usda.gov; call the MAEAP main office at (517) 241-4730; visit www.maeap.org or contact the following:

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The work sheet, charts referenced above and a list of certified CNMP providers are available on-line at www.maeap.org.