

County Farm Bureau Issue Backgrounder
June 2012
Nutrient Management Planning

Background

Wisconsin's nonpoint program was updated in 1997 to require farmers to implement nutrient management on their crop and pasture land. A key component of the law was that enforcement could not occur unless cost-sharing was made available to the farmer. Another provision of the law allowed other state programs to require nutrient management in order for the farmer to participate. These include:

- Farmland Preservation Program
- State standards for the siting of livestock operations
- DNR permits for livestock farms over 1,000 animal units
- County manure storage ordinances

The law states that once land is in compliance, it needs to stay in compliance. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (via the EQIP program) offers cost-sharing for farmers to implement nutrient management plans on a voluntary basis.

Given this extensive array of cross compliance and cost-share opportunities, one would expect that nutrient management implementation would be widely accepted and known, yet some do not believe that this is the case. Information collected by DATCP and DNR from county land conservation departments and other sources state that only two million acres of cropland (or about 20 percent) have nutrient management plans. However, when you talk with farmers, most all of them will indicate that they are doing nutrient management planning to some degree but it is not reported to a government agency.

Current Situation

The farmland Preservation Program requires farmers to comply with nutrient management requirements in order to be eligible to receive the income tax credit. In 2010, almost 16,000 landowners claimed the credit on three million acres of land (not all of the acreage is crop or pasture land).

Wisconsin has approximately 200 farms that have over 1,000 animal units, confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Federal and state law requires these farms to have nutrient management plans. As a result, about 500,000 acres would be subject to the CAFO permit.

Most counties have manure storage ordinances that require a nutrient management plan. Further, many counties over the past decade have also cost shared nutrient management planning with farmers as part of the nonpoint program, covering hundreds of thousands of acres.

Questions:

- Is the current nutrient management planning too complicated for farmers?
- How can farmers get more credit for nutrient management planning?
- Do nutrient management regulations need to be modified? If so, how?