

Volume 9: Issue 3  
April 2007



# Dairy's Bottom Line

## Getting Ready For New Nutrient Management Rules

In January the board of the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) approved the final draft of ATCP 50 – the department's Nutrient Management Rule. The rule is expected to go into effect on June 1.

Both the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and DATCP rules require all farmers (not only livestock operators) who mechanically apply manure or commercial fertilizer to cropland to have a nutrient management plan.

Nutrients that must be considered in such a management plan include nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium from manure, legumes, organic byproducts and commercial fertilizer.

Applications of those nutrients must follow soil test recommendations minus credits from nutrient sources.

### Nutrient management plan

There are four scenarios under which a nutrient management plan (NMP) is required. However, state law makes enforcement contingent on an offer of cost-sharing only for the first item:

- 1) When a producer voluntarily accepts, or is offered, government cost-share dollars for nutrient management or for the installation of manure storage.
- 2) A producer voluntarily continues participation in the Farmland Preservation Program (FPP).
- 3) A producer is regulated under a county manure storage or livestock siting ordinance.
- 4) A producer is regulated under a DNR Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination system

permit (WPDES).

After Jan. 1, 2008, nutrient management planning enforcement can take effect everywhere in the state.

### Cost-share funds

Nutrient management planning is limited by two conditions. One is the availability of cost-share funds and the other is government regulation at the state and local levels.

A cost-share offer must cover at least 70 percent of the farmer's annual cost to implement nutrient management. In cases of economic hardship, the offer must be at least 90 percent.

A farmer may accept an alternative flat payment of \$7 per acre per year for a four-year period – that's a total of \$28 per acre. Local governments do not have to provide additional cost sharing for farmers to continue this practice.

### NMP approval

Who can approve a nutrient management plan? The short answer is "someone who is qualified."

Presumed to be qualified as a nutrient management planner is a person holding one or more of the following:

- Someone who is certified as a crop consultant by the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants.
- Someone certified as a crop advisor (CCA) by the American Society of Agronomy, Wisconsin Certified Crop Advisor Board.
- A person certified as a professional agronomist (CPAg) by the American Society of Agronomy.
- A person certified as a soil

scientist by the Soil Science Society of America.

• Farmers are also presumed to be qualified to prepare their own NMPs if the farmer has completed a DATCP-approved training course and the instructor approves the first annual plan within the preceding four years. (This qualification does not apply in the case of local livestock siting ordinances.)

### Key provisions

The ATCP 50 Rule incorporates the new Nutrient Management Standard Code 590 standard.

It also incorporates a new technical note that includes cranberry operations. Cranberries are a perennial crop where tissue tests are used.

Farmers can also use their computers and a software program developed by Microsoft called Snap-Plus.

This flexible program was designed for the preparation of nutrient management plans in accordance with the 590 standard code.

Snap-Plus will calculate crop nutrient recommendations for all fields consistent with UW recommendations. It will also, using a RUSLE2-based soil loss assessment, allow producers to determine whether fields which receive fertilizer or manure applications meet the tolerable soil loss requirements.

In addition, the software program will calculate a rotational Phosphorus Index value for all fields as required for using the P Index for phosphorus management. Lastly it will compute a

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from the board

## New Members Share Objectives

Newly-elected to PDPW's Board of Directors, Eric Hillan, Gary Ruegsegger and Russel Strutz share their objectives as the organization enters a new year.

**Q: What do you hope to contribute through serving on the board?**

**Hillan:** Serving on a board means listening to people. People who are involved in the day-to-day tasks and decisions usually have the best ideas. These ideas should be, and often are, the basis for PDPW programs. This is why this organization is so unique and successful. I hope to contribute to this creative process.

**Ruegsegger:** By serving on the board, I will contribute my time, talent and knowledge. I will utilize my experiences gained over the years to help guide me to be an effective board member. While on the PDPW board, I will set down my own dairy farm hat, and represent the dairy industry as a whole in order to help move the Wisconsin dairy industry forward.

**Strutz:** As a newly elected PDPW Board member, I would like to share my experiences that I have in the dairy industry. I will strive to be innovative on dairy issues and policies that Wisconsin's dairy industry faces. I will also maintain the vision and mission of PDPW and hope that I can bring new ideas to the group.

**Q: How can PDPW continue to better Wisconsin's dairy industry?**

**Hillan:** PDPW needs to keep educating producers on issues that they may not be aware of. These issues and ideas many times come from producers who have already experienced them. Issues can range from production, to public policy, to public perception. Also, PDPW should continue to

reach out to groups that may not always agree with certain aspects of the dairy industry. Through dialogue and discussion we may still disagree, but maybe there can be better understanding between all involved.

**Ruegsegger:** PDPW can continue to better the Wisconsin dairy industry by pursuing PDPW's mission statement: "To share ideas, solutions, resources, and experiences that help dairy producers succeed." This is the focus of PDPW, and we must not lose sight of this mission statement as we go into the future.

**Strutz:** The Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin continues to be proactive and not reactive to the dairy industry. As producers, we will continue PDPW to be a LEADER in the dairy industry by facing issues head to head. We listen to the concerns that PDPW members have, which are the grass roots of this organization.

**Q: What can dairy producers in the state do to help better the industry?**

**Hillan:** Talk to people. The dairy industry has a depth of goodwill with the citizens of the state. These citizens are often curious about what takes place on a dairy farm.

Questions from how much a calf weighs, to the regulation of manure can be raised and addressed. Producers should use this goodwill to emphasize how well dairies treat their animals and the environment around them. An informed citizen may better appreciate how fortunate we all are to have the food system we do.

**Ruegsegger:** Dairy producers need to keep themselves informed and become actively involved in their own way in dairy industry issues in order to help better the industry. This involves understanding and promoting the dairy industry from an international, regional, state and local perspective. We need to work together and intelligently as a dairy industry to promote the Wisconsin dairy industry. PDPW will help provide the educational programs and training needed to achieve this goal.

**Strutz:** As dairy producers, we work together and serve as one voice. Through identifying issues, producers can educate themselves and gain knowledge they need to work with up-coming issues to improve their operations. We share ideas and brainstorm ideas and issues to keep Wisconsin's dairy industry in a positive image.

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# How to Take a Better Soil Sample From Your Fields

Soil sampling can be a very beneficial management tool for producers, if the samples are taken properly and consistently.

"Today a big driving force behind soil sampling is nutrient management plans," says Curt Weisenbeck, owner and private crop consultant for Agronomic Consulting Inc., Durand. "It's important to do it correctly."

Soil sampling allows growers to learn about their soils, and how the soil can be improved.

Results from samples can determine the soils' liming needs, estimate soil nutrient deficiencies, abundances, and aid in determining the nutrient variability of a field.

Results from soil samples can also affect the types and rates of herbicides that can be applied on a grower's field. Certain herbicide recommendations are specific.

Weisenbeck says the best time to soil sample is in the fall.

"The most opportune time is the fall," he says, adding fall usually has more favorable and conducive conditions. "I prefer to do fall soil sampling over spring."

"The soil is usually wet in spring," he adds. Sampling in the fall also allows the grower and crop consultant or dealer to work together during the winter months to complete nutrient management plans, and fertilizer application strategies.

Whether samples are taken in the fall or in the spring, the time of year should always be the same.

"Stay consistent. Don't alternate," he says. Alternating seasons increases the chances of more variable results.

The 590 Nutrient Management code, follows the University of Wisconsin soil sampling guidelines, and requires samples to be taken every four years.

However, Weisenbeck sug-

gests every three years and possibly every two years for soils with low buffering capacity like sandy soils.

A routine analysis for soils would include analyzing for soil pH, phosphorus, and potassium levels, and soil organic matter content.

"They can also test for micronutrients," he says.

Sulfur and zinc are important micronutrients to test for in corn production, and sulfur and boron are important for alfalfa.

Calcium and magnesium are important for determining liming needs and cation exchange capacity.

Cation exchange capacity, CEC, indicates the soils capacity to hold nutrients.

Cost of soil samples varies from lab to lab, but generally cost \$6.75 to \$7 per sample for a routine analysis and upwards of \$15 to \$20 per sample for micronutrients.

Growers can sample them-

selves or hire a crop consultant or dealer.

"They can do it themselves," he says. "Doing it right is important."

"If you take an acre of soil that's six inches deep, that weighs about 2 million pounds," he says. "A soil sample consists of about 1 to 2 pounds of that soil". Labs use about an ounce of soil to complete the analysis, so it is important to collect quality samples that truly represent the field.

When sampling soils, consistency is the key. The sampler should use a probe or auger to take the core samples at a uniform depth usually 6 to 7 inches deep.

If the sample depth is changed, it should be noted on the information sheet submitted to the lab with the sample.

If sampling a no-till field, cores can be taken at a shallower depth around 2 to 3 inches,

**See Sample, on Page 10**

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## Getting the Most From Your Agricultural Consultant

There are times when agricultural producers will want a professional consultant to assist them through the process of achieving profitable crop and livestock production, developing Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, applying for and maintaining CAFO permits, or planning and siting of livestock facilities. Examples of agricultural consultants include crop consultants, soil and water conservationists, engineers, livestock nutritionists, veterinarians, financial advisors, UW-Extension specialists, and others.

Public sector agricultural and conservation specialists can provide producers with valuable expertise to immediate questions, yet typically have diverse enough jobs that detailed consulting is limited.

Private sector consultants provide on-going services for

a fee to their clients. They are able to concentrate more time to understand and analyze unique details that result in farm specific technical assistance, recommendations and guidance.

A good consultant learns about their client's agricultural operation by listening, talking and observing. Professional consultants are paid to develop creative and technically sound ideas for farm business improvement and problem solving. Consultants develop specific recommendations with the goal of improving their client's business decisions through effective strategies and action plans for farm business advancement.

How do you pick a consultant? This is a question that revolves around a consultant's technical ability and understanding of your unique business and management style. It

also has a very human element including communication and people skills. You need to consider the following when screening a consultant:

- How qualified are they?
- What is their experience?
- Are they professionally certified?
- Do they have a positive standing within their industry and peers?
- Do they have a positive standing within your industry and peers?
- Along with technical abilities, are they also familiar with economic, legal, regulatory, and social issues impacting your business?
- Can your business justify the consulting fee?
- Are there expectations for you to buy anything other than unbiased expert advice and service from the consultant?
- Is this a person you can

work with and trust?

Ultimately, your consultant's technical assistance, recommendations, and guidance must be uniquely tailored for your operation, yet be objective enough to challenge your management and decisions forward.

Working with a consultant is not a substitute for farmer responsibility. Consultants only know your farm and business needs as you spend time with them. Crop and livestock producers are on the go, and seasonally very busy, yet they must commit to provide information and time for their consultants. Producers need to trust their consultant, contemplate their advice, and be willing to consider the course of action(s) recommended by the consultant.

The best consultant/farmer relationship is one

See Consultant, on Page 10



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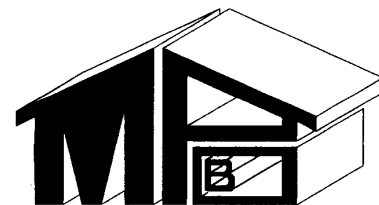
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# 'Snap-Plus' Simplifies Nutrient Management Plans

Wisconsin farmers still needing to develop nutrient management plans have a free tool at their disposal. It's called "Snap-Plus."

This computer software program might not exactly make writing a nutrient management plan a snap, but it's close.

Laura Ward Good is an assistant scientist in the UW-Madison Soils Science Department, which came up with Snap-Plus. She's the person who makes sure the technical answers that appear in response to the information farmers enter when they're using Snap-Plus are correct.

"The first time you use the program it takes a little while just because you have to get used to running it," she says. "If you have all the information, you can do a nutrient management plan for a substantial farm in a couple of hours."

Snap-Plus has been available approximately two years.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection has trained 400 people to use, it says Good.

To use the program correctly, you need what Good calls "standard" information. This includes such things as names of fields, their locations, and their soil types.

You'll also need to know things that can change from year to year. This includes the crops you intend to plant, the type of tillage you'll use, and whether or not the tillage will be performed in the spring or fall.

And, since you're forming a nutrient management plan, you'll need to punch in the amount of fertilizer you plan to apply to each field. This includes both purchased fertilizer and your farm's manure.

Good says the most time-consuming part about using Snap-Plus is getting all your information together. It's sort of

like tax preparation in that regard.

When you've entered all the information, it's time to ask Snap-Plus to print out a report. This report will tell you which fields can use manure, and what the rate should be, based on the crop that will be in the field and the expected yield. The report will also specify the amount of purchased fertilizer to put on each field.

This manure spreading plan can serve as a guide when it's actually time to apply manure, Good points out. She says a farmer can hand a copy to a custom applicator or to an employee, to make sure the right fields get the right amounts of nutrients.

Besides providing crop nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium recommendations for each field, while taking into account the nitrogen provided by legumes and the nutrients from manure, Snap-Plus can do three more things.

It can provide a soil loss assessment that lets a producer figure out whether or not fields getting commercial fertilizer or manure meet "T." In this case, "T" stands for the level of "tolerable" soil loss. What's more, Snap-Plus bases the soil loss assessment on something called "RUSLE2." That acronym stands for "revised universal soil loss equation, version two."

Next, the Snap-Plus program can provide a phosphorus index for each field. And, it can develop a rotational phosphorus balance. Both these reports, says Good, can help farmers make sure their fields are not receiving too much phosphorus, and that phosphorus levels in the soil do not become excessive.

A nutrient management plan developed using Snap-Plus satisfies the USDA's 590 requirements, Good says. Such

See Snap-Plus, on Page 8

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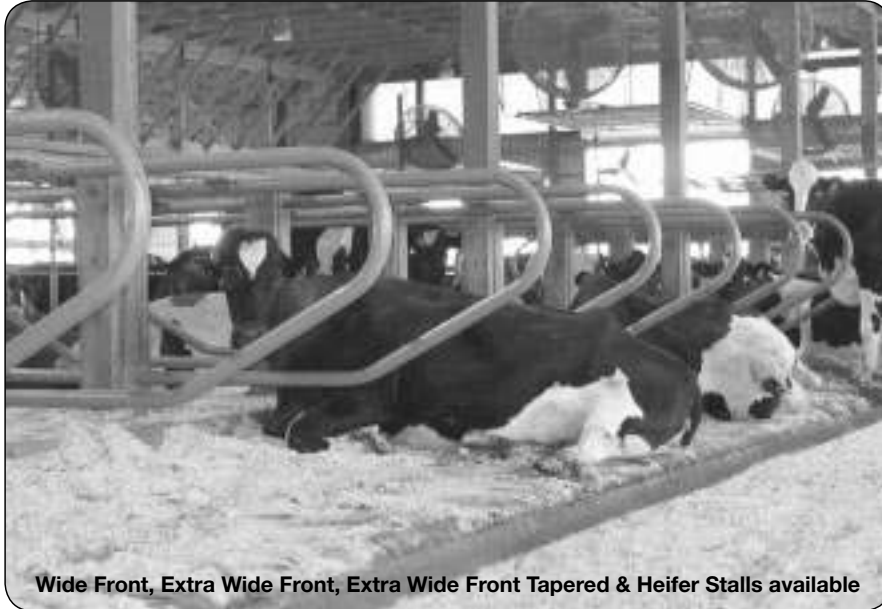
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## – Snap-Plus

**Continued from Page 6**

a plan can also help livestock farmers get their “confined animal feeding operation” (CAFO) permits.

Snap-Plus is “really good for record keeping,” Good says. “It keeps track of a continuous string of years and works across a rotation. Once you get your whole rotation in there, you really don’t have to do that much to it except update it. We’re really trying to strive to make this useful for the users and as a record keeper for planning.”

Improvements to Snap-Plus are in the works. One that Good says is “hopefully” coming later this year is the ability to make standard manure and fertilizer applications across all of a farm’s fields without entering the information for each one separately.

In addition, the people who make Snap-Plus work are going to design a system that lets producers, crop consultants or agronomist get customized

reports. “That’s a high priority for those of us who are working on this program,” says Good.

This customized report feature will let Snap-plus users run “what-if” scenarios. That is, they can change variables, such as the manure application rate, and see the outcome.

Good says the soil science department is working with UW-Madison Agricultural Economist Tom Cox to eventually put in links that will help make economic assessments of different choices. How much money will no-tilling a particular field save versus some other type of tillage, for example. Or, where does it make the most sense, economically, to apply manure?

Says Good, “We really want to make sure that it’s useful for the people who need to make decisions about soil fertility on a field-by-field basis.”

The program is at: [www.snapplus.net](http://www.snapplus.net).

*By Ron Johnson*

## – Rules

**Continued from Page 1**

rotational P balance for using soil test P as the criteria for phosphorus management.

### Runoff

Manure applications to frozen or snow-covered land must comply with supplementary local restrictions, if any, spelled out in an individual farm conservation plan agreed upon between the farmer and the county land conservation committee.

Nutrients may not run off the field during application and may not be spread in certain areas, such as fields where erosion is occurring in excess of “T” value; surface water areas or areas of established concentrated flow; and areas of permanent non-harvested vegetative buffers or wetlands.

Spreading (using mechanical application) may not take place within 50-feet of drinking water wells.

Nutrients may not be applied to frozen or snow-cov-

ered ground within 1,000 feet of a navigable lake or within 300-feet of a navigable stream.

### NR 243

Russ Rasmussen, director of the DNR’s Bureau of Watershed Management, detailed changes to NR 243 at the DNR Board’s January meeting.

“We added a note to clarify that the nutrient management standard in ATCP 50 applies to non-permitted facilities. Permitted facilities are point sources,” Rasmussen said.

While the DNR’s 243 rule is more consistent with the NRCS 590 standard than in the past, Rasmussen said, “the NRCS 590 isn’t adequate for all conditions.”

Rasmussen told Dairy’s Bottom Line, “NR 243 requires any spreading to meet a setback distance of 100 feet from a drinking water well and 1,000 feet from a municipal drinking water well.”

*By Joan Sanstadt*



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## – Consultant

**Continued from Page 4**

where both know and trust each other. The farmer must be able to trust that the consultant's advice is accurate and farm specific to the point that very little about the recommendation needs contemplating. With firm trust, the farmer moves quickly toward the consultant's recommended action because it is a good business decision.

Producers who remain engaged in ongoing training –

education – and awareness of agricultural and environmental issues will be prepared to ask the correct questions when working with a consultant. They will be better able to understand recommendations offered by their consultant, and will ultimately be better able to make informed decisions.

*By Kevan Klingberg*

*UW-Extension outreach specialist  
Discovery Farms Program*

## – Sample

**Continued from Page 3**

he says.

"Soil pH can be more acidic in shallower depths of no-till fields," he explains. "With lack of tillage in no-till, the soil is not being constantly mixed."

Try to avoid unusual, unrepresentative areas when sampling.

"When a person is sampling, use common sense and avoid headlands, field boundaries, old fence lines, and areas where heavy manure was applied or piled," he explains.

When taking samples, 10 to 12 cores should be taken per every five acres. Mix the cores thoroughly in a bucket. Keep approximately 2 cups of the mixed soil for the sample.

"It's important to have 10 to 12 cores for your sample," he says. "Too many cores can be too large a sample to submit to the lab."

Currently there are three types of sampling available.

The first is conventional sampling which a sample is taken based on the size or acres of the field. The cores are taken in a zigzag or "w" pattern throughout the field.

The second is GPS grid sampling. Fields are split into 2 to 2 1/2 acre grid cells, and each cell is sampled individually. When using GPS, each sample location is geo-referenced and logged.

"You can go back to the exact location," he says adding that geo-referencing reduces variability in the sampling, and

allows samples to be taken from the exact location in the future.

When controlling variability, a higher quality, more accurate sample is collected with more consistent results.

"Using geo-reference grid sampling does help eliminate some of the error," he explains.

The third type of soil sampling is zone or area sampling. The zones can represent the different soil types throughout a field or suspect areas found from yield mapping. Sampling can be done in high or poor yielding areas and is also geo-referenced.

As GPS mapping has become more popular so has grid and zone sampling.

"A lot is changing," he says. "More consultants are shifting that way."

Grid sampling also allows growers to use variable rate fertilizer and lime applications.

Weisenbeck also suggests adding the soil series name for each field on the lab soil information sheet.

"Providing that information will result in more specific recommendations on the soil sample report," he says. The soil types and names can be obtained from the NRCS or from the farm's conservation plan.

Sending samples to the same lab year after year also helps with testing consistency.

"If you start with one lab, stay with that lab," he says.

*By Sarah Watson*

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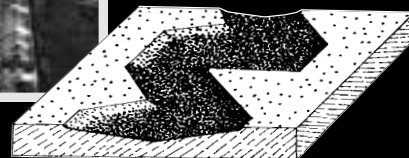
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## Grant Program Helps Teach Farmers About Nutrient Management

Does your farm have a nutrient management plan? Every farm in Wisconsin is supposed to have one sometime in 2008, yet it appears that as the clock keeps ticking, many do not.

Kevan Klingberg is the outreach specialist for the Wisconsin Discovery Farms project. He says one statistic he recently saw is that only about 10 percent of the state's crop acres are covered by nutrient management plans.

"It's something people had better get moving on," Klingberg comments. "That leaves a big 90 percent to do."

Producers are not alone in learning how to develop nutrient management plans for their farms to meet the 2008 deadline. Through the Nutrient Management Multi-Agency Land and Water Education Grant program (also called MALWEG), counties are helping farmers learn how to write nutrient management plans.

Twenty-seven projects have

received MALWEG funding for 2006 and 2007, according to Klingberg. He says these efforts are delivering nutrient management training to 271 farmers.

"This practical mix of classroom and on-farm activities is designed to help farmers develop their own nutrient management plans based on the USDA's nutrient management standard 590," Klingberg explains. "Training is based on the University of Wisconsin and UW-Extension Nutrient Management Farmer Education Curriculum."

The average cropland size of the 270 participants is 300 acres. That translates to approximately 81,000 acres.

"Through this training, 95 percent of the farmers follow through to develop their own nutrient management plans, resulting in approximately 255 plans on 76,500 acres," says Klingberg. "A key point in this training and delivery mechanism is that producers voluntarily participate in small-group

and one-to-one activities. They use their own farm information and management goals to develop their own nutrient management plans."

The result, says Klingberg, is a nutrient management plan that each participant "owns, understands and is willing to implement" as a result of his or her direct participation in the process.

Most of the farms participating in this nutrient management plan training are dairy operations. They use the typical rotations of corn for grain, corn silage, hay, small grains and soybeans. Some also graze their cattle, and some farms grow potatoes and irrigated corn, soybeans and peas.

Each local project is lead by its own team. This often includes UW-Extension staff from the county, the land conservation department, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff, UW nutrient and pest management people, and staff of the state's tech-

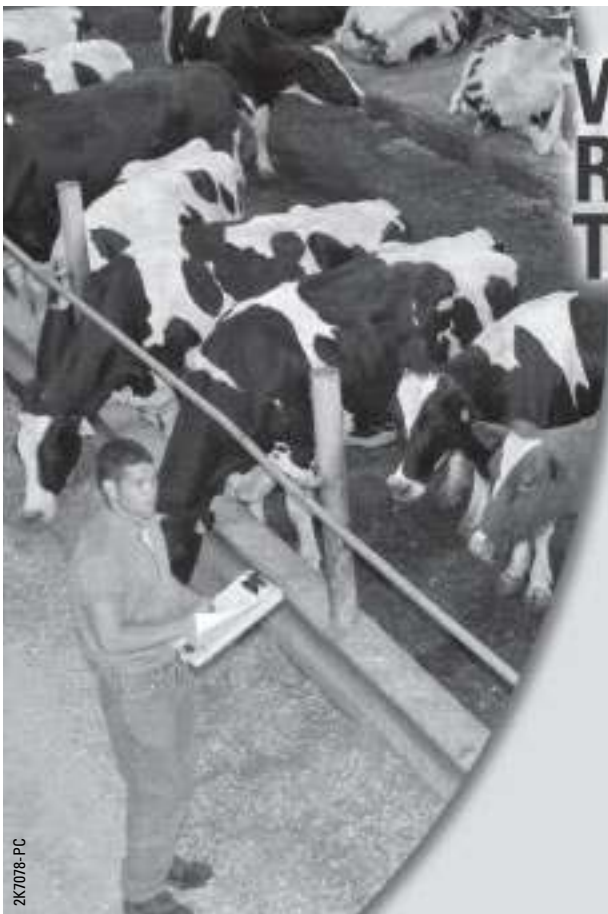
nical colleges.

Each farmer gets about 20 hours of instructional time. This includes at least two workshops – one on crop nutrition, soil fertility and nitrogen credits, and the other one on phosphorus and the main points of environmental regulations related to nutrient management. Each workshop consists of four hours of small-group training, led by the local team.

"After classroom activities, farmers receive on-farm assistance to evaluate their livestock manure management activities and their status with current soil testing," Klingberg explains. "This step is where manure spreaders are calibrated, farm-specific nutrient crediting details are defined, and the farm's soil and water conservation plan is evaluated. This interaction can add up to another eight hours or more of one-to-one training."

Next comes actually com-

**See Grants, on Page 16**



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## Grants

Continued from Page 14

pleting nutrient management plans. Farmers can either do this with their trainers or go to a third workshop and work on their plans there. Last comes finalizing each plan. Klingberg says this takes another four hours, as project leaders walk participants through the process of plan development.

Once a farmer has been trained, he or she is certified for four years, Klingberg notes. Then it's time for an update.

### Local emphasis

Counties getting MALWEG money to teach farmers to develop nutrient management plans are allowed to fine-tune their teaching to meet local needs. Last fall, 10 counties – Calumet, Clark, Dane, Eau Claire, Fond du Lac, Langlade, Manitowoc, Portage, Sauk and Taylor – received grants, as did the Western Wisconsin Technical College.

Just what are counties

doing? Steve Ottelien, the Dane County soil and water conservationist, says the workshops are “quite in-depth” and tend to focus on the concept of matching the inputs – feed and fertilizer – that come onto a farm and those produced on that farm to what the growing crops need. That way, excess nutrients do not build up in the soil.

Dane County's nutrient management training also deals with all nutrients, not just manure, he points out. And, it teaches farmers about such things as the right and wrong times to apply manure, and about how far applications should stay from streams and lakes.

In the fall, the Dane County team begins meeting with farmers and conducts a survey of their nutrient management practices. Starting in October and November like this gives farmers a chance to take soil

See Local, on Page 18

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## Local

Continued from Page 16 samples.

The two workshops take place in January. In February and March, nutrient management plans get finalized.

The Dane County team likes to hold each class size to 10 farmers. This allows for hands-on participation and makes for "a very open dialog," Ottelien says.

Dane County has taught 30 farmers to write nutrient management plans over the past three years. Ottelien says the team hopes to continue this work, if it can keep getting MALWEG money.

This training does just more than teach farmers how to develop nutrient management plans, according to Ottelien.

"I think it has a large impact on their general understanding of what nutrient management is about and the environmental aspects of it," he says. "And I think it also

removes some of farmers' fears of what it's about."

In eastern Wisconsin's Calumet County, the local emphasis is seen again. Matt Glewen, the UW-Extension agriculture agent there, says MALWEG funding is used to train farmers who operate on areas of shallow soils and where the bedrock is near the surface. That, he adds, takes in about 60 percent of Calumet County and is called "Karst" topography.

"These are areas where shallow limestone bedrock comes to within as shallow as a foot or two of the soil surface. All of them have the potential for groundwater contamination. They're most concerning when they're overlain by coarse soils."

This limestone bedrock is often fractured, its cracks making it easy for contaminants like manure or commercial fertilizers to get into groundwater. When coarse soils lie on top of

the bedrock, it's still relatively easy for groundwater to become contaminated.

Calumet County's education program spends quite a bit of time on managing nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and on protecting groundwater. For instance, "We talk about the structures we need to be aware of and stay away from for manure applications," Glewen says. These include rock outcroppings and sinkholes.

This program also includes "quite a bit about the time of year and the risk potential, like spreading manure on snow or frozen ground, or when the soil is saturated or close to it," Glewen adds.

Calumet County also has its share of tiled fields, so that is included in the nutrient management training. The UW-Extension agent says, "We're becoming increasingly aware of tile lines' potential for carrying nutrients away from fields, so we try to make people

aware of those."

Calumet County's efforts are partly driven by its livestock siting ordinance. Rules relating to nutrient applications on soils with shallow bedrock will likely be finished within six months, Glewen says.

Like other counties, Calumet County limits its class sizes. It typically takes eight to 12 farmers a year, but the number is based on the total number of acres they farm. That means the county writes nutrient management plans on 3,000 to 5,000 acres each year.

Glewen says farmers in Calumet County generally hold the attitude that "Nutrient planning is a fact of life, so deal with it."

Nutrient management training through Multi-Agency Land and Water Education Grants is helping them and farmers in other Wisconsin counties do just that.

By Ron Johnson

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## Cost-Sharing Makes Nutrient Management Planning Affordable

There are many resources to aid producers in developing a nutrient management plan. On the financial side, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is there to help.

According to Pat Murphy, NRCS state resource conservationist for Wisconsin, the State of Wisconsin ag performance standards state that cropland should have a 590 plan if cost sharing is available.

However, at this time, "there's not enough money or planners to carry this out," he says.

When the state created the standards it set a cost share rate of \$28 per acre or roughly \$9 per acre per year for three years.

Federal dollars are available through NRCS and its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Those manure-based plans have cost-sharing at 70 percent of the total cost. This rate is \$8 per acre per year for

three years.

Murphy says he believes the cost-sharing rates make nutrient management planning affordable.

"Those rates will cover the majority of creating the plan," he says. Although, the cost of soil samples and other content needed for the plan remain a cost to the landowner.

Those added expenses keep the producer financially involved in the plan. Murphy mentions that they've found that "unless producers have some financial stake, their willingness to commit long-term is less successful."

The time commitment it takes to complete a plan is also a valued resource provided by a producer.

Assuming a 200-acre conventional row crop farm, it will take one hour for every 10 acres to build the plan, Murphy says. However, on a livestock operation when you include manure management "it becomes a much more diffi-

cult task." You could increase the time by at least a half hour per 10 acres.

Creating the original plan is where most of the time commitment comes in. "Once you have that, you just have to maintain it every year," he says. Most soil samples have a four-year life span, so you'll only need to make minor adjustments.

A majority of the cost is the agronomist's time or the time training the producer to do their own plan, notes Murphy.

Although the time and money invested in a plan does reap some benefits.

For the producer, creating a plan ensures that money invested in fertilizer is money well-spent based on University of Wisconsin recommendations. "It won't guarantee the biggest bumper crop, but it will not be deficient (in nutrients)," he says.

Recent studies have shown that excessive nutri-

ents may not be beneficial to the crop after all. By controlling the amount of nitrogen applied to a field it manages the amount that seeps below where the crop can use it, at which it could drift into groundwater.

The plans also make sure soil loss is at management levels, which reduces runoff to surface waters.

Phosphorus is another issue. Nutrient management plans also prevent over-application of this nutrient.

Thus, "less excess nutrients could be lost to the environment if the right storm event occurs," he says.

For livestock producers the manure management planning can help lessen odor and address whole-farm risk assessment for runoff.

To learn more about cost-sharing available to your operation, visit your local County Land Conservation Department.

By Karen Topel

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## What Is a Farm Nutrient Management Plan?

Ideally, a farm nutrient management plan is a strategy for obtaining the maximum return from your on- and off-farm fertilizer resources in a manner that protects the quality of nearby water resources.

Sounds easy, right? Well in many cases it is. In others, nutrient management planning involves some unique challenges. All plans require thought and understanding between the person developing the plan and the person following the plan - the farmer.

There are basic components to all farm nutrient management plans. These include the following:

- **Soil Test Reports** - Complete and accurate soil tests are the starting point of any farm nutrient management plan. All cropland fields must be tested or have been tested within the last four years.

- **Assessment Of On-Farm Nutrient Resources** - The amount of crop nutrients supplied to your fields from on-farm nutrient resources such as manure, legumes, and organic wastes need to be determined and deducted from your base fertilizer recommendations.

- **Nutrient Crediting** - Once your on-farm nutrient resources are determined, your commercial fertilizer applications should be adjusted to reflect these nutrient credits. This action will not only reduce your commercial fertilizer bills, but it will also protect water quality by eliminating nutrient applications that are in excess of crop need.

Management skills come into play when determining nutrient credits. For example, to properly credit the nutrients

**See Plan, on Page 23**

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## Plan

### Continued from Page 22

supplied from manure, a grower must know both the manure application rate and the crop available nutrient content of the manure. To credit the nitrogen available to crops following alfalfa, the condition of the alfalfa stand as well as last cutting date need to be known.

- **Consistent With Your Farm Conservation Plan** - A nutrient management plan needs to be consistent with your farm conservation plan. If you participate in any federal farm programs, you probably have a soil conservation plan for your farm.

The conservation plan is another important component of any nutrient management plan for it contains needed information on your planned crop rotations, identification of the slopes of all fields, and the conservation measures you are following to maintain your soil erosion rates at "T" or tolerable

rates.

In the event that you do not have a soil conservation plan for your farm, or your existing farm plan does not meet "T", the information contained in a conservation plan will have to be obtained before a nutrient management plan can be developed.

- **Manure Inventory** - Probably the most challenging aspect of a nutrient management plan is the advance planning of manure applications. This involves estimating the amount of manure produced on the farm and then planning specific manure application rates for individual cropland fields.

One trick is calibrating your manure spreader. This is done using scales - either your own platform scales or portable axle scales available from your county UW-Extension or Land Conservation office. By cali-

brating your manure spreader, you will know the number of tons of manure your spreader typically holds. Once this is known, a specific number of spreader loads can be applied to a given field in order to deliver a planned manure application rate.

- **Manure Spreading Plan** - The amount of manure the farm produces has to be applied to fields in a manner that makes sense both environmentally and agronomically.

Planned manure applications should be made at rates that do not exceed crop nutrient need as identified in the soil test report. The nutrient management plan will also prioritize those fields that would benefit the most from the manure-supplied nutrients while posing little threat to water quality. Also, the nutrient management plan will identify those fields that have manure-spreading restrictions.

Examples of such restrictions would be fields adjacent to lakes and streams, sloping fields, and fields in the vicinity of wells, sinkholes, or fractured bedrock.

The seasonal timing of manure applications to cropland will also be identified in the farm nutrient management plan. The timing of planned manure applications will depend upon each farm's manure handling system.

- **The 590 Nutrient Management Standard** - The 590 standard is a USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service document that defines the minimum requirements and components of an acceptable nutrient management plan.

**Editor's note:** *This article was prepared by the Nutrient and Pest Management Program, UW-Extension and UW-Madison, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.*



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