

Upper Mississippi River Basin CEAP Report

Talking Points for State Conservationists

The CEAP report on the effects of conservation practices on cultivated cropland in the Upper Mississippi River Basin has been released. The major findings of the report are that—

- Conservation practices have been effective in reducing soil erosion;
- The greatest remaining issue in the basin is the loss of nutrients, particularly soluble nitrogen, to the environment;
- Comprehensive conservation planning that includes a combination of erosion-control and nutrient management practices is the most effective way to maintain existing gains while also reducing nitrogen loadings; and
- Targeting our efforts to the acres most in need of treatment will yield the greatest results.

Because nutrient management is the greatest conservation need in the region—and because nutrients from this region may contribute substantially to the hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico—as an agency we must develop and implement a strong program of nutrient management with our partners and producers throughout the region.

To this end, using the Mississippi River Basin Initiative as our guide, we have to assemble the stakeholders in each state to reach consensus on nutrient reduction goals and on voluntary conservation approaches for achieving those goals. We will build upon the efforts in each state to develop regional and national strategies for limiting nutrient losses to the environment.

In preparation for the National Leadership Team meeting next month, I ask you to begin to—

- identify the areas in your state where the nutrient problem is most severe,
- identify the gaps in the current state of knowledge about the problem that you need to fill before you can effectively address it; and
- contact your partners in the farm, conservation, and environmental communities and in state government to lay the groundwork for collaboration to address the problem.

If we cannot successfully reduce nutrient loadings and demonstrate the level of reduction, we can rest assured that the next step will be increased regulation of farming activities.