Managing Land Application of Nutrients in Pennsylvania with NRCS Assistance

Do I need one of the required Pennsylvania Agriculture Regulatory Plans to get NRCS assistance?

No. If you need NRCS assistance to voluntarily improve how you handle, store, treat, or land apply manure or agricultural wastewater sources of nutrients, you need a type of NRCS Conservation Plan known as a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). Please note, although PA Agriculture Regulatory Plans are not needed to participate with NRCS, you are required by Pennsylvania Regulations to have those plans in place and implement them.

See the brochure “Which Plan do I need for NRCS help? Getting NRCS Help in Pennsylvania to manage manure” to learn what is in a NRCS CNMP, how it compares to an Act 38 Nutrient Management Plan or Chapter 91 Manure Management Plan, and how it helps you voluntarily make resource improvements.

If you decide not to pursue NRCS assistance, see Penn State Extension’s website for Pennsylvania’s Nutrient Management Program to learn if you need to comply with one of the various Pennsylvania Agriculture regulations.

Since I don’t handle, store, treat or apply manure or wastewater sources of nutrients to the land, can I get help from NRCS to manage nutrients from other sources?

Yes. Planning information about each source of nutrients that you use and your management approach will be needed to develop a site specific Conservation Plan that address these concerns. This information is also used to determine eligibility for NRCS financial or technical assistance. All requests for assistance will be prioritized according to national, state, and locally established program ranking questions, planning criteria and available staff time for addressing water, air, and related resource concerns caused by managing nutrients.

What additional planning information do I need to get NRCS assistance to manage nutrients?

Detailed checklists are available from your Conservation Planner or Technical Service Provider. CNMP checklists help you review the combined contents of your Nutrient Management element equivalent in content and format of an Act 38 Nutrient Management Plan (NMP), Conservation Plan addressing soil erosion and sediment control concerns, and engineering plans for evaluating and planning of needed improvements to your production facility, feedlot, manure and wastewater storage and treatment structures, and any areas or mechanisms used to facilitate transfer of manure and wastewater.

I have a NRCS Nutrient Management 590 plan; is that good enough for more NRCS assistance to manage nutrients?

Not usually. The NRCS Conservation Practice Nutrient Management code 590 only addresses lands where plant nutrients and soil amendments are applied, not where they are handled, stored, or treated. If you have been applying plant nutrients to basic 590 criteria and are requesting assistance to improve your methods or change your approach, assistance is available to enhance nutrient application methods. But, in any case involving the handling, storing, treating, or application of manure or wastewater, you need a CNMP first.

I am required to have a Chapter 91 Manure Management Plan. Is that the same as an NRCS CNMP?

No. The requirements for a CNMP apply only if you need help from NRCS to manage nutrients from manure and wastewater sources. See also the question “Do I need one of the required Pennsylvania Regulatory Plans to get NRCS assistance?” DEP’s Chapter 91 plan does not require soil and manure analysis (although encouraged). No certification is required to write a Manure Management Plan and it does not need to be approved by an agency.

Do NRCS CNMPs need approval?

NRCS CNMPs need to be approved by NRCS reviewers trained in the Interagency Nutrient Management Program, certified to provide conservation planning assistance for NRCS clients, and knowledgeable in engineering practices commonly used to address water quality concerns caused by managing manure and other sources of nutrients.

What help is available to enhance my current basic nutrient application methods?

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provide finan-
cial and technical assistance to enhance your current basic nutrient application methods with advanced approaches or techniques.

You may want to refine your application of plant nutrients using the 4R approach by applying the right source of nutrients at the right time and rate and in the right place. For improving the nutrient value of manure, assistance is available to help you inject manure closer to the time of plant uptake. There are precision-application systems that can help you adjust application rates for defined zones within a field or advanced systems to adjust rates in real time using guided GPS variable rate applicators. Adaptive approaches to managing nutrients involve adjusting decisions according to feedback from replicated field trials.

Assistance for other approaches or management levels may also be available, so contact your local NRCS field office for further information about improving beyond a basic level of managing nutrients.

I have a small scale, diversified, vegetable, fruit, mushroom, or organic operation. Can I get help managing nutrients on my farm?

Yes, there are funding scenarios or enhancement activities available for different approaches to agriculture. NRCS Conservationists will help you select the alternative that best fits your needs. Usually NRCS does not have the capacity for staff to consult on implementing your nutrient management plan. Funding scenarios include reimbursement for hiring consultants to help you manage nutrients according to your approach.

Do I need a Chapter 102 Agricultural Erosion and Sediment Control Plan to get NRCS assistance for managing nutrients?

No. For areas where nutrients of any kind are to be applied to grow crops, or specifically for areas where manure or wastewater sources of nutrients are to be applied, stored, or treated, a Conservation Plan to manage nutrients must also meet planning criteria for soil erosion and water quality. Such areas include lands used to grow crops, pasture animals, or as farmsteads. And such a Conservation Plan may be used to satisfy requirements by DEP’s Chapter 102.4(a) regulations for Agriculture Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan (Ag E&S Plan).

Please note, although not required to have a Chapter 102 E&S plan to participate with NRCS, you are required by Pennsylvania Regulation to have those plans in place and implement them.

Also, if you have a Conservation Plan approved for compliance with the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended, you may need to modify it to meet current planning criteria for soil erosion and then add practices to also address water quality concerns from managing nutrients. Soil erosion carries away valuable soil and plant life nutrients, causes water pollution, and increases storm water runoff and flooding. Erosion and Sedimentation control is an important benefit of implementing Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans and the conservation practice Nutrient Management code 590.

Record-Keeping

Record-keeping is an extremely important part of managing nutrients. Records provide proof that your plan is being followed and are especially useful if an unpreventable discharge of stored nutrients occurs due to weather or other circumstances beyond your control. A reviewable record also allows you to evaluate your system and make cost-effective improvements over time.

More Information

NRCS can help you manage nutrients for your operation. Assistance may also be available from certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs). You may qualify for financial assistance for plan writing or related practice implementation under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). For more information on EQIP, see:


Additional financial assistance to enhance the practice is also available under the Conservation Stewardship Program at:


Natural Resources Conservation Service

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