

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW

Step 1



Get a Nutrient Management Plan

The first step in complying with Maryland's Nutrient Management Law is to get a nutrient management plan. Under the law, nutrient management plans must be developed by:

- Farmers who are certified by MDA to develop nutrient management plans solely for their own operations, or;
- Maryland Cooperative Extension advisors certified and licensed by MDA, or;
- Private consultants certified and licensed by MDA



Farmers interested in becoming certified to write their own nutrient management plans should contact MDA or their local Maryland Cooperative Extension office for a training schedule. Nutrient management planning services are available through local Extension offices. Farmers interested in hiring a private consultant should contact their regional nutrient management office or visit www.mda.state.md.us for a list of certified and licensed consultants. In most instances, cost-share assistance is available to help pay for private consultant services.

Step 2



Keep Plans Current

Farmers need to revise and update their nutrient management plans at least once every three years using new soil test data. Farmers who use manure will need to have it analyzed for nutrient content at least every other year. Changes in an agricultural operation that occur within the three-year period may require farmers to modify or update their plans sooner. Typical changes may include the introduction of a new crop, a change in the nutrient source or a change in acreage farmed or livestock managed. Farmers also need to review their plan periodically to ensure that it meets the needs of the operation and accurately represents current management.

Step 3



Maintain Accurate Records

A good record keeping system enables farmers to evaluate crop management and nutrient management decisions while helping consultants to write more accurate plans. During the review process records help MDA nutrient management specialists verify an operator's compliance with his/her nutrient management plan. For this reason, it is important that farmers maintain accurate records, including a copy of the current plan, receipts for fertilizer purchases, yield histories, current soil test results, manure or biosolids analyses, field by field amounts and rates of nutrients applied and current soil test results. Both Maryland Cooperative Extension and MDA have record-keeping tools that can assist with this task.

Step 4



Implement the Plan

Farmers should follow and implement their current nutrient management plan during each cropping season. Changes in crops or nutrient sources, animal mortality, disease or market factors and unanticipated weather conditions may affect how a nutrient management plan is implemented. These factors should be noted in the farmer's records in order to justify changes in how the plan has been implemented. Modified or updated plans are not submitted to MDA but are kept on file by the operator.



Step 5



Keep Applicator Vouchers Up to Date

Farmers who apply nutrients to 10 or more acres of cropland are required to attend a two-hour applicator training course once every three years. The training—which covers management issues such as split applications, equipment calibration and application rates—is offered regionally through Maryland Cooperative Extension. Participants are issued a voucher good for three years upon successful completion of the training. MDA will alert farmers when their vouchers are about to expire so that they can arrange follow up training through their local Extension office.

Note: Farmers who are certified to write nutrient management plans are not required to attend this training.

Step 6



File an Annual Implementation Report

All farmers covered by the law must file an Annual Implementation Report with MDA by March 1 of each year in order to remain in compliance with the program. This report verifies any changes in the operation and lists all types of nutrients applied to each crop during the previous calendar year. Most of the information needed to complete the report is contained in the nutrient management plan, but crop acreages, fertilizer receipts and records of other types of nutrient inputs will be needed in order to complete the form. Annual Implementation Reports are mailed to farmers each December. Additional forms and instructions are available at regional nutrient management offices or online at www.mda.state.md.us.

MDA nutrient management specialists conduct implementation reviews annually to verify that plans are current and being followed. These reviews are targeted toward farmers who have not submitted current Annual Implementation Reports, operations with a history of compliance problems and other operations based on potential risk, including animal operations and farms using manure, imported organic wastes and sludge. During the review, the MDA nutrient management specialist will compare nutrient recommendations outlined in the farmer's nutrient management plan to nutrient application records and fertilizer receipts. The specialist will ask to see the farm's most recent nutrient management plan and the following documents:

- Farm map detailing crop fields
- Current soil test results and manure analyses, if applicable
- Field specific nutrient recommendations
- P-Site Index calculations and recommended best management practices
- Nutrient source information including analysis/content and purchase receipts
- Nutrient rates, quantity and application, timing and method
- Actual field specific or management unit yield information for the last five years
- Applicator voucher or certificate number
- Records/justification of plan modifications

Once the review is completed, the farm operator will be given a copy of the report. If the operator is in compliance with program requirements, no further action is necessary. If program requirements have not been met, recommendations are provided and an additional evaluation/follow-up visit may be scheduled.