

Smaller farms aim of manure talks

University Insight

By **JERRY MAY**



LAST spring, more than 200 livestock producers from across the state participated in Manure and the Environment on Small and Medium Farms, an MSU Extension-sponsored workshop that took place in 19 locations throughout the state. Those in attendance told us that they left with an increased understanding of their environmental responsibilities. And, as always, we learned a lot from them, too. Here's what they told us:

Manure application practices consistently rose to the top of the list of concerns for these producers. Many reported that calibrating manure spreaders to improve the rate of application would be a high priority on their farms. Taking soil samples and using the test results to ensure that manure is applied at agronomic rates was another high priority. Farmers noted the importance of recordkeeping, recognizing that records provide the history that demonstrates that a farm is managed in an environmentally sound manner.

Key Points

- Environmental assurance help is available to small to medium-sized farms.
- MSU Extension is hosting programs throughout the state.
- Winter manure spreading will be one of the discussion topics.

Managers of livestock and dairy farms with open concrete lots acknowledged that they must control runoff, preventing it from reaching any surface waters or neighboring lands. Beef and dairy producers with bunk silos reported a better understanding of silage leachate and silo pad runoff risks, and realized that they must ensure that those two sources of low-nutrient wastes do not contaminate any surface or groundwaters. Dairy producers expressed concern about controlling and appropriately disposing of milk house wash water and wastes.

Spreading manure on frozen or snow-covered fields (winter spreading) is an accepted practice in Michigan, but the farmers who attended these programs recognized the special challenges associated with winter spreading. The Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices recommend that farmers maintain a minimum of 150 feet

between manure spread on frozen or snow-covered fields and surface waters and open tile inlets. GAAMPs also limit manure application to fields with less than 3% slope for liquid manures and 6% slope for solid manures. Workshop participants reported increased awareness of which of their fields may be used for winter manure application.

Sources of assistance

Do these concerns sound familiar? If so, you don't have to deal with them alone. MSU Extension educators, the Michigan Department of Agriculture Groundwater Stewardship technicians and Michigan Milk Producers Association technicians are all available to assist farmers. By showing you the benefits of tools such as the GAAMPs and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, these experts can help you meet your environmental goals.

The GAAMPs for Manure Management and Utilization — commonly referred to as the manure GAAMPs — cover issues with manure production, utilization, field application and livestock odor that apply to all small and medium-sized livestock farms. These same GAAMPs are applicable to large livestock farms, too, but large livestock farms must also adhere to the more extensive requirements of the federal Clean Water Act.

The MAEAP Progressive Planning Program provides an opportunity for small and medium-sized farms to follow a stepwise approach to environmental protection. Progressive planning allows a producer to assess all aspects of the livestock farm and prepares the operator of any size farm to complete a comprehensive nutrient management plan. Producers can use such a plan to become MAEAP verified or to apply for cost-share dollars from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Meetings coming your way

If you missed the Manure and the Environment on Small and Medium Farms programs in 2007, you'll have a chance to participate in one this year. The MSU Extension Animal Agriculture and the Environment Team and the Dairy Team will sponsor similar meetings throughout the state. The two-hour programs will teach producers how to evaluate their farms for areas of concern and learn where to go for information to address environmental risks.

For more information on the programs, contact an MSU Extension office.

May, an Extension pork educator based in Gratiot County, is a member of the MSU Extension Animal Agriculture and the Environment Team. You can reach him at mayg@msu.edu.

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