



Environmental Mediation Center

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Consensus Building Institute

Agricultural Working Group Summary of Recommendations

Three key policy directives needed to address water quality initiatives on farms

1. The AWG requests increased resources for the Agency of Agriculture to adequately undertake education, technical assistance, and enforcement necessary for improved water quality.
2. The AWG recommends that the Agency of Agriculture require all farms subject to the Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAP) to certify that they are in compliance with the AAPs.
3. The AWG recommends a strategy that creates a more robust baseline of requirements and that also allows farmers the option to develop “smart” tailored plans.

Specific Short and Near Term Steps to Improve Water Quality Initiatives on Vermont Farms

1. Farm Compliance with Regulations

- Increase awareness of the requirements of the AAPs;
 - Education, outreach and technical services on line, reader friendly mailings and increased publicity;
 - Mandatory education of farmers and custom applicator training
- Increase inspection and enforcement capabilities of VAAFMM;

2. Farm Certification: Annual certification to VAAFMM of compliance with the AAPs.

3. Livestock Exclusion from Surface Water

- Livestock exclusion from water channels prevents erosion of sediment and direct excretion into waterways.
- Extent of exclusion to be balanced with livestock stocking rate, frequency, seasonality, condition of the waterways, and whether the waterways connect to larger water bodies as well as whether there is a management practice of intensive grazing that will restore the stream banks.
- There needs to be a process to receive a waiver where appropriate and each application for a waiver will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Agency.
- Livestock owners should be encouraged to apply for EQIP or CREP prior to being considered eligible for state funding in order to maximize use of federal dollars for the state.

4. Buffers

- Vegetated buffers between exposed cropland and adjacent waterways help reduce sedimentation and therefore decrease inputs of phosphorus into water.
- Buffers should take into account soil type, slope, and distance to surface water.
- Perennial buffers of a minimum of 25 feet unless they have an approved NMP based on NRCS standards and buffers are not less than 10 feet.

5. Erosion to T: Regulation should be reduced from soil loss to 2T to soil loss to T.

6. Winter Spreading Ban

- a. Where a farmer has no history of violations of AAPs, MFO or LFO regulations, and has a NMP that was developed by a certified planner, and includes environmentally sound strategies for winter spreading tailored to the specific conditions of the farm, as approved by VAAFM may have the option of site-specific winter spreading.

7. Nutrient Management Planning

- b. Provides opportunity for farm to develop best practices management for nutrients, can lead more efficient utilization of farm resources, cost savings.
- c. VAAFM to develop a screening tool for determining what farms need NMPs, based on such factors as farm topography, adjacency to waterways, intensity of livestock use, and other factors, and not by the scale nor size of the farm in and of itself.

8. Whole Farm Incentives Program

- Farms and farmers should be rewarded for outstanding water quality improvement efforts, innovation, and best practices.
- Whole farm water quality conservation planning is the gold standard for today and over time, should become accepted and regular practice across most farms in the future.
- The goals of the program should include, but not be limited to: 1) provide financial, reputational, and other incentives to outstanding actors; 2) encourage the adoption of whole farm water quality conservation planning over time; and 3) reward and advance best practice and innovation in on-farm practices that improve water quality.
- This program should not take monetary, technical and educational resources away from existing state and federal incentive programs that seek to address on-going problems and actions necessary for farms to meet water quality rules and regulations.
- The program could include elements of regulatory certainty that the agricultural community may value more as the regulatory baseline of required water quality practices to be implemented in order to reduce pollution in Lake Champlain becomes clear.