

Nutrient Management In Bedford County

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Nutrient management in Bedford County means different things to different people. To the public, it means factory hog farms taking over the county. To most farmers, however, it means complying to government regulations.

Bedford County is located in the southcentral part of Pennsylvania. It is essentially a very rural county, covering 652,040 acres, or about 1,018 square miles. Most of these acres are forested land with a small percentage in residential or commercial land and 213,500 acres in farmland.

Although people may get the impression that hog farms cover Bedford County, dairying is the main farm enterprise in the county. As of 1998, the county had about 18,900 milk cows.

The number of dairy farms in the county is about 255 compared to 75 hog farms. A farm needs to have at least 10 dairy cows to be classified as a commercial dairy and only one hog to be listed as a hog farm, according to the Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service.

What is the definition of a factory hog farm? An operation that concentrates many animals into one or a few buildings, usually on a small amount of land that is not enough acreage to absorb the large quantities of manure produced by the facility. The result is a need to store the manure until it is exported to surrounding lands for application.

Bedford County has very few corporate hog farms located here. Since Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Act was passed in 1997, farmers or operators had until October 1, 1998, to submit a nutrient management plan to their local conservation district for approval.

So far Bedford County has received six nutrient management plans from concentrated animal operations that fall under Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Act guidelines. Of those six plans, two are for proposed hog operations on which construction never began. One operator changed his mind about constructing a hog facility, while the other is

tied up in litigation with a group of concerned citizens. Two more of those six are for small (1,000 hogs) finishing operations.

Bedford County also has several operations that have voluntarily completed nutrient management plans. All of these are dairy operations, except for one, which is a combination dairy and hog operation. At the conservation district, we are expecting the requests for volunteer plans to increase by the end of this year. More funding is expected to come from Harrisburg in late 2000 for best management practices through special grant programs, such as Growing Greener, COOL, and the Nutrient Management Act grant program.

While the fine details of these grants haven't been worked out yet, the one theme that prevails is that farms must have nutrient management plans approved by the conservation district in order to receive any monies. This applies to even to those farms that aren't CAOs.

This is especially good news for counties that aren't in the Chesapeake Bay watershed because funding for best management practices in these areas of the state are hard to come by.

Bedford County has a Chesapeake Bay program, and since its inception, more than a million dollars in cost share projects have been completed. Bedford County ranks second only to Lancaster County for Chesapeake Bay monies spent.

Best management practices installed include agricultural waste storage, diversions, heavy use protection areas, roof runoff management, waste transfer systems, stream crossings, grazing systems, spring developments, waterways, stacking areas, underground outlets, filter areas, and agriculture waste fencing.

A waiting list for project requests exists in Bedford County. These new grant monies will help us get to people who have been on the list for two to three years. If you know you have a nutrient management problem on your farm, contact your local conservation district about getting on a list for these funds.

