

Nutrient Plan Reviewers Hone Skills

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Workshop participants from conservation districts across Pennsylvania reviewed an actual nutrient management plan to identify inconsistencies, incomplete information, and other flaws in the plan.

The detailed exercise was part of the process of learning how to make sure livestock producers with concentrated livestock operations submit final plans that are complete and accurate.

"Some of these plans take three or four revisions before they're ready to present to the board," Goodlander said.

After a nutrient management plan is first submitted, reviewers have 90 days to work with the producer to ensure the plan is ready.

According to Sautter, nutrient management planning is an ongoing process.

"It is constantly being refined," he said. "It's the science of it that changes."

Reviewers must also take orientation and plan writing workshops and pass an environmental knowledge examination in order to be provisionally certified. After satisfactorily reviewing two nutrient management plans, they receive full certification.

Soil fertility and manure management workshops

are also "highly recommended," Sautter said.

Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Act (NMA) is in the process of being revised by the SCC, along with the input of a state nutrient management advisory board consisting of farmers, agribusinesspersons, conservation planners, scientists, and representatives of state agencies, including the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Final draft revisions are expected to be ready for legislative consideration by early in 2004, according to Goodlander.

Key changes proposed in the NMA draft include incorporating a phosphorus index (P-index), requiring verification of conservation plans prior to nutrient management plan approval, certification of commercial manure exporters, and additional restrictions on manure storage and application.

Concerning phosphorus-based nutrient management, an initial review of about 500 fields on 11 farms (with both low and high concentrations of livestock) in the state showed about 20 percent of the fields will require phosphorus management, according to Goodlander.

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