



FACT SHEET

Agriculture/Natural Resource Extension

Robert A. Kluson, Ph.D.

*** Best Management Practices *
Resources and Regulations**

This month our newsletter is dedicated to the topic of Best Management Practices for agriculture and natural resources. This subject may or may not be familiar to you. The purpose of this article is to introduce you to some of the resources and regulations that are explaining the definitions and requirements of Best Management Practices. This subject is a timely example of how a partnership involving agriculture, the Institute of Food and Agriculture Science of the University of Florida (UF/IFAS), Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Water Management Districts, and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) is providing science-based information and education to sustain agriculture as providers of food and fiber for our society and as stewards of the earth. I encourage you to read the following information and websites provided here to increase your understanding about the intent and your responsibilities with Best Management Practices for different production operations of agriculture. I invite agriculture producers to contact me for further information about and registration into the Best Management Practices Program. Together we can work on this important initiative towards sustainable agriculture in Sarasota County.

1) What Are Best Management Practices?

Best Management Practices, also called BMPs, are guidelines advising producers how to manage the water, nutrients, and pesticides they use in order

The Journey to Sustainability Begins With Education

to minimize agriculture's impact on the state's natural resources. BMPs were developed as part of the implementation plan of the 1999 Florida Watershed Protection Act that was passed to provide Florida compliance with provisions of the 1972 Federal Clean Water Act (FCWA). BMPs were developed because agricultural activity has been linked to the contamination of watersheds with nutrients (e.g., nitrogen and phosphorus), pesticides and discharged sediments and water. Because much of the state is built on limestone, which allows water to return relatively unfiltered to the aquifer, pollutants can enter the water supply quickly, endangering humans and ecosystems. In addition to addressing water issues across the state, the BMPs will also help address concerns in South Florida about water quality in the Everglades by reducing nutrients and pesticides from entering the Everglades ecosystem. The BMPs for all types of agricultural production are intended to be applied statewide within 2 years.

The BMP Program is the product of a collaborative effort under the leadership of the FDAC's Office of Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP). For example, OAWP is required under state law to work with the FDEP to scientifically demonstrate the water quality effectiveness of adopted BMPs using a select number of farm field sites with the intent of revising BMPs over time, where appropriate, based upon the outcomes. OAWP routinely incorporates university expertise into the entire BMP process, e.g., projects dealing with issues, such as nitrate reduction in groundwater, nutrient reduction in surface waters, and other collaborative ventures like developing successful load reduction predictive computer modeling programs. OAWP field staff is strategically co-located with all five water management districts. Staff works with water management district personnel to better coordinate permitting issues on projects that involve agriculture.

2) How Do I Learn The Best Management Practices for My Operation?

BMP manuals are being developed to be a user-friendly tool to assist Florida farmers and ranchers with the implementation of conservation-based practices to reduce agricultural nonpoint source pollution impacts to receiving water bodies. BMP manual development is highly dependent upon stakeholder participation. At a minimum, groups such as OAWP, FDEP, Water Management Districts, various

The Journey to Sustainability Begins With Education

grower associations, and growers themselves are vital to the process. The final adoption of the BMPs manuals follows defined procedural steps to insure science-based accuracy. Critical steps usually include: identification of need; creation of Steering Committee; definition of agency roles; formation of technical workgroups; production of draft manual; peer review text; hold public workshops; adopt manual in code; and, print manuals for distribution.

BMP manuals are now available online at the website of OAWP (see section 5 for website address). As of this month, there are currently eleven (11) BMP manuals that have been adopted. These manuals cover such agriculture production operations in citrus, silviculture, cow/calf, aquaculture, vegetable & agronomic crops, and nurseries. Some BMP manuals are for a specific industry in a specific region (e.g., Peace River Citrus), while others are for the state's entire industry (e.g., Vegetable and Agronomic Crops).

Most of Florida's agricultural industries have BMP manuals, and those that don't soon will. BMP manuals coming out in the near future include those for the state's equine, field nursery, forage, and sod industries. On the OAWP website there are also the interim BMP manuals for some of these agriculture areas.

3) What are My Compliance Requirements of the Best Management Practices?

Compliance with BMPs is currently voluntary (except for certain areas such as the Everglades Agriculture Area), assuming levels of participation among Florida growers continues to grow. There is a Notice of Intent (NOI) document that is required to be signed as your formal notification to FDACS of your commitment to implement selected practices or adopted BMPs. It is a form of registration with the Department that you intend to participate in a particular BMP program. Farmers who choose to follow BMPs must keep records of their compliance with the standards. The NOI must be executed by the landowner or leaseholder, since he or she is obligating the property to a particular management scenario (BMP). Furthermore, the submittal of the BMP is required by law if participating landowners desire eligibility for the waiver of liability, the presumption of

The Journey to Sustainability Begins With Education

compliance with water quality standards, and cost share funds for BMP implementation.

Ultimately, BMPs need to be incorporated into a farm plan. Proper planning results in informed, progressive decisions that will achieve the goals of the BMPs. These “decisions” are then recorded as a list of things to do. To fully integrate BMPs into a meaningful farm plan also requires the use of the following steps: an on-farm assessment, a quality assurance program that details operation and maintenance requirements, and incorporation of other federal conservation planning requirements, as appropriate.

4) What Are The Funds Available to Landowners to Implement Best Management Practices?

BMPs encourage the careful monitoring and management of resources used, both in the amount used and the ways used (including timing and placement). There are a number of state and federal funds, referred to as cost-share, to assist growers with the implementation of BMPs. These funds are important because some BMPs require more costly, structural retrofits and special equipment that can be expensive. The intent of these cost-share programs is to mitigate the financial impact for producers to encourage them to begin complying with the guidelines.

5) Websites for Additional Information about Best Management Practices:

1) FDACS Office of Agriculture Water Policy – Best Management Practices Forms, Documents and Manuals

(<http://www.floridaagwaterpolicy.com/BestManagementPractices.html>)

2) IPM Florida – Water Quality BMPs (<http://ipm.ifas.ufl.edu/applying/water-quality/index.htm>)

The Journey to Sustainability Begins With Education

3) UF/IFAS “Solutions for Your Life” - Best Management Practices: The Future of Florida Agriculture

(http://ics.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/hot_topics/agriculture/bmps.html)

Sarasota County Extension
6700 Clark Road, Sarasota, Florida 34241
(941) 861-5000; Fax: (941) 861-9886
Website: <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu>

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.