



Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans: A Producer's Guide to CNMPs in Wisconsin

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Nutrient and sediment loss from cropland and livestock facilities is an important environmental issue facing Wisconsin livestock producers. The need to develop and implement nutrient management plans has grown as a requirement of government programs, including agricultural zoning, livestock siting ordinances and animal feeding operation permits. Improved nutrient management will enhance farm profits and improve relations with rural neighbors. Good nutrient management will also reduce the amount of nutrients and sediment that enter waters of the state.

Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) can be thought of as whole-farm livestock environmental plans. Certain USDA programs now define circumstances where producers must develop CNMPs in order to qualify for program participation.

In 2003 Wisconsin-NRCS worked with the UW Discovery Farms Program to develop a CNMP protocol that clearly defined necessary plan components and a suggested method for planners to develop CNMPs with farmers. The project focused on revising the CNMP planning format and then testing it with livestock producers around the state. The goal of this project was to cooperatively develop a final WI CNMP format that had input from WI-NRCS, agricultural producers and qualified planners.

This brief summarizes an 8-page factsheet, developed as a result of the NRCS/Discovery Farms project. This information will help agricultural producers better understand a CNMP and anticipate the planning process if they choose to have one developed for their farm business.

What is a CNMP?

CNMPs are conservation plans that are unique to livestock operations, with planning standards and criteria defined and administered by the USDA-NRCS. They document practices and strategies which are adopted or planned by livestock producers to address natural resource concerns related to soil erosion, livestock manure handling, emergency response actions and disposal of organic by-products.



A well-designed CNMP can also be useful when applying for a state or local livestock siting permit, a facility expansion permit or manure storage permit. Livestock producers who are interested in specific details about Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning should talk to their local NRCS staff.

What is the value of a CNMP?

One of the values of a CNMP to agricultural producers comes through the farm-specific process of interacting with a consulting team that they hire to develop the plan. Another value is the creation of a detailed document that defines the current farm conditions and management strategies, lays out future plans for change and outlines a roadmap towards that change.

How does a CNMP mesh with state nutrient management requirements?

Producers who develop a CNMP will meet state and local nutrient management requirements because one of the components of a CNMP is the development of a nutrient management plan based on the current NRCS Nutrient Management 590 Standard for Wisconsin.

What are the challenges of developing a CNMP?

The biggest challenge in developing a CNMP is to make it valuable to the farm operation by keeping it real and functional. CNMPs can tend to become paper heavy, so the most valuable piece for producers is a well-organized

plan summary and action plan. CNMPs can cost \$ 5,000 or more, depending on crop acres, animal numbers, facility and landscape challenges, expansion plans and current environmental impact (cost-sharable, as available).

What are the individual components of a CNMP?

WI-NRCS has a detailed website devoted to CNMP components and expectations for creating a document that fully meets standards – see www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cnmp.html. The website contains downloadable tools, references and templates. Many of these templates, tools and the stepped planning processes resulted from the NRCS and Discovery Farms project that created a CNMP development protocol for Wisconsin. All CNMPs must document the natural resource status or impact, as well as management response associated with soil erosion, livestock manure handling, disposal of organic by-products, and emergency response actions within the following categories:

1. Introduction, general info., emergency response
2. Maps and site photos
3. Manure and wastewater handling and storage
4. Public health
5. Soil and water conservation
6. Nutrient management
7. Record keeping
8. Feed management
9. Pest management
10. Prescribed grazing
11. Appendix



Each of these chapters, when combined, becomes a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan. An assessment of each CNMP component by the agronomic and/or engineering consultant must be provided to develop a complete picture of the farm operation. The consulting team assists the producer to identify and prioritize farm management response, as needed.

How does the work get done?

Farmers who are interested in developing a CNMP should contact their county NRCS to discuss plan development and implementation. Producers hire qualified consultants to begin the on-farm evaluation process. At a minimum, an engineer and an agronomist begin a detailed process of farm visits, livestock and farmstead facility evaluations and cropland management evaluations. Along the way, a soil and water conservation planner and/or feed consultant may be needed. The consultants systematically work with the producer and each other



to complete the plan. A completed CNMP includes a targeted list of improvable practices or changes that the producer agrees to pursue to achieve a higher level of environmentally sound agricultural management.

Upon plan completion, the producer delivers a copy of the CNMP to the county NRCS office where the plan is reviewed. The whole process, from sign-up through delivery of a final plan, should take less than one year. A prioritized list of improvements or changes identified within the CNMP becomes the framework that guides NRCS in providing producers with technical assistance and cost sharing (as available) for practices such as manure storage, clean water diversions, well abandonment, etc. Furthermore, producers with an approved CNMP will likely qualify at a higher participation level for the voluntary USDA–Conservation Stewardship Program.

Who are qualified consultants to develop CNMPs?

At a minimum, all CNMPs need the expertise of an agronomy consultant and an engineering consultant. The WI-NRCS website lists qualified private sector consultants that producers can contact for CNMP development: www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/planners.html

This brief, along with an 8-page factsheet about Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (UWEX publication GWQ 051) are available from the UW Discovery Farms office, PO Box 429, Pigeon Falls, WI 54760, and 715-983-5668 or at our website: www.uwdiscoveryfarms.org

