

## Step 1

# Assessment and Information Gathering

Objectives:

After completing this section you should:

1. Have developed an environmental policy statement for your operation.
2. Have completed an assessment of your operation and developed a prioritized list of what improvements, if any, need to be made to be in environmental compliance and minimize negative environmental impacts.
3. Gathered the information required to complete the subsequent steps in developing a CNMP.

Documentation filed in this section:

1. Environmental policy statement.
2. Completed assessment forms (Farm\*A\*Syst, Utah AFO Strategy brochure assessment forms, and/or other assessments).
3. Prioritized list of improvements and target completion dates.
4. Completed survey of information for the remainder of the CNMP.

## Assessing your operation

The first and perhaps most important step in nutrient management planning is to assess your operation and current manure management practices. Throughout the year are there any farm practices that result in discharges to surface or ground water sources? Some of these practices may be obvious while others may not. When assessing the operation be honest. Keep in mind that, according to federal law, no manure or contaminated wastewater can be discharged into any surface water sources, including ditches that leave an operators property. Similarly, according to Utah State law contaminants cannot be discharged into ground waters such as through a leaking storage pond or lagoon liner. There is no minimum volume required for a release to be considered a discharge. All manure and contaminated wastewater from livestock facilities, manure storage sites, and land application areas must be contained.

When assessing your operation consider where manure, wastewater, and field runoff go during the year. Rainwater or melting snow that comes into contact with manure on a feedlot and then runs into an irrigation ditch may not appear to cause any problems. However, if the ditch leaves the owner's property or connects to any natural stream this could be considered a discharge. Similarly, storing contaminated wastewater in a structure without a proper lining to limit leaching is against the law. Even manure applied on fields can lead to a discharge if rainfall, snowmelt, or irrigation tail water leaves the site and enters a surface water body.

Several resources are available to help farmers assess their operations. The Farm\*A\*Syst program includes a series of farm assessment guides and worksheets which lead individuals through a structured evaluation of farm activities and practices. The assessment provides a separate risk rating for individual activities. Recommendations are provided to improve the situation if the risk rating for any activity is high. These as well as other materials on farm assessment and nutrient management are available through your local Utah State University Extension or USDA-NRCS office, and on the Internet at:

<https://extension.usu.edu/waterquality/Agriculture.htm>, and  
<http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/treemenuFS.aspx?Fips=49049&MenuName=menuUT.zip>  
(Enter CAFO/AFO in the search menu to find the 12 Step Materials)

It may be helpful to have an outside, nonregulatory assessment of your operation. Someone unfamiliar with the day-to-day activities of a facility may be able to identify problems not apparent to the owner or manager. Consider organizing an assessment team made up of local producers with similar interests. Have the team assess each member's facility and discuss recommendations for improvements. Contact local employees of the Soil Conservation District, USDA-NRCS, Utah State University Extension, the Utah Farm Bureau Federation or the appropriate commodity group to obtain additional information on assessing livestock operations.

Additional notes