

Why Your Operation Should Have an Agriculture Environmental Management System¹

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An **Agriculture Environmental Management System (AEMS)** provides a systematic approach to achieve your environmental and other operational goals.

If you answered **YES** to one or more of the questions in the box at right, an **AEMS can help your operation.**

As your operation's leader, you know that interest in environmental protection and sustainable development is growing each year. You might hear about these issues from your commodity group, customers, the public, or others. Like many, your operation may be increasingly challenged to demonstrate its commitment to the environment. Implementing an AEMS can help you **meet this challenge** in several important ways.

Do you need an AEMS? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you required to comply with **environmental laws and regulations**?
- Are you looking for ways to improve your **environmental performance**?
- Is the state of your operation's environmental affairs a significant **liability**?
- Does a **lack of time or resources** prevent you from managing environmental obligations effectively?
- Is the relationship between your **environmental goals** and other goals unclear?

"It is now the policy of US-EPA to encourage the usage of ANSI/ISO 14001 Environmental Management Systems in every type of regulated and non-regulated industries, including agriculture."

James Horne, Special Assistant US-EPA Office of Wastewater Management

¹ Adapted from: Environmental Management Systems: An Implementation Guide for Small and Medium-Sized Organizations. Ann Arbor, MI: NSF International, January 2001.

First, an effective AEMS makes good sense. By helping to identify the **causes** of environmental problems and then **eliminate** them, an AEMS can help you **save money**.



Think of it this way:

- Is it better to **produce high-grade food and fiber products consistently** or to risk the costs associated with shrinkage or lowered grading at the market?
- Is it cheaper to **prevent a discharge in the first place** or to clean it up afterwards?
- Is it more cost-effective to **prevent pollution** or to manage it after it has been generated?

Second, an AEMS can be an **investment in long-term viability** of your operation. An AEMS can help you to be more effective in achieving environmental goals. And, by helping your business to improve the quality of your products, an AEMS **adds value**.

The good news is that much of what you need for an AEMS may **already be in place!** The recommended management system framework includes many elements that are common to **managing many operational processes**, such as Dairy Herd Improvement Program, irrigation water management, feed management and Integrated Pest Management. As you begin to develop your AEMS, you will probably find that your operation has many AEMS processes in place, even though they may have been designed for other purposes. Integrating environmental management with other key operational processes can improve financial, quality **and** environmental performance.



The key to effective environmental management is the use of a **systematic approach** to planning, controlling, measuring and improving an operation's environmental performance. Significant environmental improvements (and cost savings) can be achieved by assessing and improving your operation's **management processes**.



Many environmental “problems” can be solved without installing expensive pollution control equipment.



EMS Facts

EPA encourages the use of EMS that improve compliance, pollution prevention and other forms of environmental performance. The Agency is assessing how EMS can be used to strengthen environmental programs and policies.

Of course, there is some work involved in planning, implementing and maintaining an AEMS. But many operations are finding that the development of an AEMS can be a **vehicle for positive change**. Many operations are seeing that the benefits of an AEMS far outweigh the potential costs.

In the Total Quality Management (TQM) world, they say that “quality is free” — as long as you are willing to make the investments that will let you reap the rewards. The same holds true for environmental management.

AEMS – FAQ's

I already have a CNMP – why do I need an AEMS?

An AEMS can help you to comply with regulations more consistently and effectively. It also can help you identify and capitalize on environmental opportunities that go beyond compliance.



AEMS – FAQ's

How big does an operation need to be to successfully implement an AEMS?

AEMS have been implemented by operations ranging in size from a family farm to many thousands of employees. The elements of an AEMS are flexible by design to accommodate a wide range of operational types and sizes.

You may be asking yourself whether developing and implementing an AEMS would be worth your time and effort. Listed below are some of the costs and benefits associated with AEMS. The EMS model has demonstrated significant cost savings across a broad spectrum of industries. As we learn more we will refine the following list:

AEMS Costs and Benefits

POTENTIAL COSTS	POTENTIAL BENEFITS
<p><u>Internal*</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff (manager) time • Other employee time <p><u>External</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential consulting assistance • Outside training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved environmental performance • Enhanced compliance • Prevention of pollution/resource conservation • New customers / markets • Increased efficiency / reduced costs • Enhanced employee morale • Enhanced image with public, regulators, lenders, investors • Employee awareness of environmental issues and responsibilities

***Note:** Internal labor costs represent the bulk of the AEMS resources expended by most operations

If your operation already has or is considering a quality management system (based on TQM, Six Sigma or ISO 9001, for example), you will find there are a lot of common aspects between what you need for **quality** management and for **environmental** management (see below).

Some Common Aspects of Quality and Agriculture Environmental Management Systems

<u>QMS</u>	<u>AEMS</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Policy • Responsibilities and Authorities • Training • System Documentation • Process Controls • Document Control • System Audits • Management Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Policy • Adequate Resources • Responsibilities and Authorities • Training • System Documentation • Operational Controls • Document Control • System Audits • Management Review

Finally, small and medium-sized operations often have certain **advantages** over larger operations in ensuring effective environmental management. In smaller operations, lines of communication are generally shorter, operational structures are less complex, people often perform multiple functions, processes are generally well understood, and access to management is simpler. These can be real advantages for effective environmental management.

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