

## Nutrient management: Friend or Foe

It is not surprising that many producers do not have nutrient management on their radar screens. Putting together a plan can be as intimidating and overwhelming as trying to do your own income taxes. Why would a person put themselves through that ordeal if they didn't have to? The initial response would most likely be there is no good reason. However, even if a farm does not need a nutrient management plan, learning about the many management strategies that can be painlessly implemented, and that comply with regulations currently in place could offer several advantages. In many instances, there are opportunities to lower costs (i.e. feed) on the farm while at the same time maintaining or improving production. There is the possibility to improve the whole farm nutrient balance and the public's perception of farming. Consider the following questions.

1. Are lowering feed costs and improving air and water quality at the same time realistic?

Phosphorus and nitrogen are the two main elements that are concerns regarding water and air quality. They are also the same two nutrients that tend to be overfed on farms and can increase feed costs substantially. In the current situation of higher feed costs and lower milk prices, this could be the time to seriously evaluate the level of phosphorus and protein being fed. The first step in being good environmental stewards is to reduce the excretion of these elements in the manure.

2. What is the P-index?

It is very likely in the next couple of years, phosphorus based nutrient management planning, instead of nitrogen based, will be in place. The phosphorus index or P-index is a tool which evaluates the fields on which manure will be applied. It incorporates a rating system for nutrient transport factors (i.e. erosion) and source factors. Using the P-index scale, determinations will be made if nutrients (manure or fertilizer) can be applied based on nitrogen, based on phosphorus crop removal, or if no phosphorus can be applied.

3. Is there any financial assistance available?

There are numerous cost-sharing programs available that provide assistance to producers. Recently, the federal government has allotted funds that can be used towards environmental improvements.

4. How do I know if regulations apply to me?

The "Foe" for most people lies in the regulation part of nutrient management. The key to finding out if you are in compliance or what direction you need to be going in is by first contacting the right people.

5. How can I become environmentally aware?

The PEACCE program (Pennsylvania Environmental Agricultural Conservation Certification of Excellence) was developed to *promote* environmentally safe agricultural practices among livestock and poultry producers, to encourage them to minimize risks to the environment and in turn minimize personal liability. By successfully completing three components of the program, producers *get recognized* who meet or exceed standards as established by PEACCE. They receive a farm sign and are publicly recognized for meeting and exceeding the environmental standards of the program.

More in-depth answers to these questions will occur at the Dairy-PR workshops scheduled at various locations across the state on September 24, October 3 and 16, 2002. The registration fee is \$10 per person. The registration fee is off-set by funding from the PEACCE program. Detailed information can be obtained by contacting Virginia Ishler at [vishler@psu.edu](mailto:vishler@psu.edu) or 814-863-3912.