



AgBrief

Nutrient Management Program

Office of Resource Conservation

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The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) Nutrient Management Program protects water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries by ensuring that farmers and urban land managers apply fertilizers, animal manure and other nutrient sources in an effective and environmentally sound manner.

Agricultural Nutrient Management

All farmers who earn at least \$2,500 a year or manage at least 8,000 pounds of live animal weight must, by law, operate their farms according to a nutrient management plan. Farmers must submit copies of that plan to MDA, update it before it expires, take soil samples at least once every three years, obtain manure analyses (if using manure), and submit Annual Implementation Reports documenting how they implemented their plan during the previous year. Also, farmers who apply nutrients to 10 or more acres a year are required to attend a two-hour nutrient applicator course once every three years.

There were 5,382 farms in Maryland required to follow nutrient management plans during FY 2013. MDA oversees (1) licensing and certification for consultants who develop and write the plans; (2) education and training programs for farmers; and (3) compliance and enforcement activities.

Agricultural Nutrient Management Plans

Nutrient management plans are science-based documents that help farmers manage their fields to maximize crop yields and minimize nutrient runoff. They stipulate how fertilizers, including animal manure, are applied to fields. **Nutrient Management plans are written by trained and certified consultants.**

MDA trains and certifies these consultants, some of whom are farmers, to write nutrient management plans. MDA also offers a two-day training course on the fundamentals of nutrient management for those interested in taking the Nutrient Management Certification Exam. After the first year of certification, consultants must take six hours of continuing education classes to renew their certification. They must take 12 hours of continuing education classes every three years thereafter. Businesses that provide nutrient management consulting services must be licensed by MDA and are required to file an annual report of their activities.

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Enforcement

Nutrient management regulations are updated from time to time to reflect the latest science and sound agricultural practices. When new regulations are enacted, MDA may implement them in phases. The first phase focuses on education and technical assistance so that farmers know what they have to do. The second phase provides farmers with the resources they need to come into full compliance. The last phase focuses on enforcement activities.

MDA's nutrient management specialists ensure that nutrient management plans are developed and implemented according to state regulations and perform comprehensive on-site inspections of farms. If, during these inspections, an operation is found to be out of compliance, MDA may provide compliance assistance or take enforcement actions. Enforcement options include administrative or judicial actions, which can result in orders or fines. In 2013, MDA conducted 738 on-farm inspections, representing about 14 percent of regulated farms. MDA inspects 10 percent of the farms every year. The agency prioritizes its inspections to include operations with a history of compliance problems and those that would pose the greatest risk to public health and the environment if they were out of compliance.

Farmers must be in compliance with nutrient management requirements as a condition for participating in cost-share grants and other incentive programs.



Urban Nutrient Management — Maryland’s Lawn Fertilizer Law

Lawn fertilizer now accounts for 44 percent of the fertilizer sold in Maryland. While certain restrictions on fertilizer use have been in place for farmers since 2001, everyone needs to do their part to protect and restore the Bay.

Maryland’s Lawn Fertilizer Law, which took effect October 2013, helps protect the Bay from excess nutrients entering its waters from non-agricultural sources, including golf courses, parks, recreation areas, athletic fields, businesses, hundreds of thousands of lawns and other non-agricultural sources.

Nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus, are key ingredients in lawn fertilizer. When it rains, lawn fertilizer can wash into storm drains and streams that flow into the Chesapeake Bay. Once in our waterways, fertilizer contributes to the growth of algae blooms that block sunlight from reaching Bay grasses, rob the water of oxygen and threaten underwater life.

The Lawn Fertilizer Law:

- **Requires fertilizer manufacturers to reformulate their products to limit the nutrients the fertilizers contain** while still providing products that help homeowners and lawn care professionals maintain healthy lawns. In FY 2013, MDA’s State Chemist, which analyzes these fertilizers to ensure they are in compliance, issued six Stop Sale Orders for turf/lawn fertilizers that had unacceptable phosphorous levels.
- **Requires homeowners to follow fertilizer application restrictions**, use best management practices when applying fertilizer, observe fertilizer blackout dates, and follow University of Maryland recommendations when fertilizing lawns. Simply put, if the homeowner follows the directions on the fertilizer, they will likely be in compliance.
- **Requires lawn care professionals hired to apply fertilizer to be certified by MDA or work under the direct supervision of an individual who is certified.** This applies to professionals for hire as well as individuals responsible for turf management at golf courses, public parks, athletic fields and other non-agricultural properties. A list of certified applicators is available at: www.mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer.

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Resources:

- **The nutrient management program** - extensive information for both farmers and citizens about the nutrient management program is online: www.mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Pages/nutrient_management.aspx
- **Maryland’s Lawn Fertilizer Law** - extensive information for commercial and professional fertilizer applicators and citizens is online: www.mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer



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