



Agricultural Environmental Management ***Help Your Farm Grow – Reduce Environmental Risk***

By Barbara Silvestri

In the last issue, we introduced New York State's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program and the benefits it offers to farms of all types and sizes. Conducting a confidential AEM Risk Assessment is a quick and easy way to take a comprehensive look at your farm's impact on natural resources and acquire information for long-term business planning. The assessment can help you document your environmental stewardship, prioritize areas presenting risk, identify opportunities to save money, and locate available local, state and federal resources to address potential concerns.

You can schedule a free, confidential AEM Risk Assessment with your County Soil and Water Conservation District. The first step will be completing an *AEM Questionnaire* and the *AEM Watershed Site Evaluation Worksheet* with the help of conservation agency staff. The *Watershed Site Evaluation Worksheet* looks at your farm's specific location and site characteristics to determine which of the AEM Worksheets should be completed in order to focus on the water quality issues that are a priority for your farm.

Virtually identical farm operations in different locations might have entirely different environmental concerns. Perhaps your farmland drains to a stream with high sediment levels, or into a lake used as a drinking water supply where pathogens such as *Giardia* or *Cryptosporidium* are a concern. Perhaps it sits above an underground aquifer that already has elevated nitrogen levels. In each case, the assessment is tailored to focus on issues and opportunities important to your farm, and minimize the farm's impact on water quality.

The following are some of the AEM 'Core' Worksheets that are used for many farms.

Manure Management - This worksheet looks at practices to maximize the benefits of manure as a crop nutrient source and soil conditioner, while minimizing the risk of pathogens, nutrients and organic material entering waterbodies or contaminating water supplies. The worksheet also considers maintaining good neighbor relations and avoiding odor complaints.

Farmstead Water Supply - Determine if your water supply or neighboring wells are at risk for contamination. This worksheet evaluates how safe your well is from being impacted by your farm activities.

Barnyards - Properly managing the concentrated nutrients in the barnyard reduces pollution risks, minimizes odor complaints and promotes livestock health. This worksheet addresses barnyard runoff and keeping clean water clean by diverting it away from the barnyard and other heavy use areas.

Stream and Floodplain Management - Protecting stream corridors not only improves habitat for fish and wildlife but also clearly demonstrates your concern for the environment to your community. This worksheet documents your efforts to protect nearby waters and identifies the many sources of funding available to promote stream health.

Pasture Management - Let your cows do the work! Well managed pasture can produce a high quality feed that can be very cost effective. This worksheet examines planning and management decisions that

promote quality feed production, reduce production costs, minimize soil erosion and the risk of water quality degradation, while enhancing wildlife habitat.

Soil Management - Preventing erosion and enhancing soil quality makes good economic and environmental sense. This worksheet can help you determine if you have excessive erosion which can reduce yields, degrade your soil resources, and increase potential water pollution.

Other worksheet topics include *Petroleum Products Storage* and *Livestock Odor Management*. There is also an *Agriculture and the Community Worksheet*, which addresses neighbor relations and can help add up the benefits that your farm provides to your community. In addition to these Core Worksheets, there are specific worksheets tailored to *Dairies*, *Greenhouse Operations*, *Vineyards* and *Horse Farms*. All the AEM worksheets are available on the web at www.nys-soilandwater.org/aem/techtools.html.

If you would like to schedule a free, confidential AEM Risk Assessment for your farm, contact your County Soil and Water Conservation District. For contact information, visit www.nys-soilandwater.org.

Watch future issues for a closer look at key AEM worksheets that can benefit your farm!