

Manure Management Manual

Land Application of Manure

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who needs to have a plan?

A: Every agricultural operation in PA that land applies manure or agricultural process wastewater is required to have and implement a written Manure Management Plan (MMP) that meets the requirements outlined in the Manure Management Manual (Manual) regardless of the number acres available for nutrient application, the number of animals housed on site, the method of application (mechanically or directly deposited by livestock or poultry), or where the manure or agricultural process wastewater was generated (on-site or imported from an off-site location).

Q: If facility only stores manure, has no animals and does not field apply manure, do they need a MMP?

A: Unless a water quality management permit or other approval is obtained from DEP, the agricultural operation should follow the criteria outlined in the Manual and PA Technical Guide. At minimum, this should include completion of the General Information and the Manure Storage section of the MMP, compliance with DEP regulations in Chapter 91.36, and recordkeeping for manure storage activities.

Q: What is the DEP policy concerning manure management for activities such as 4H projects?

A: All agricultural operations, including 4H projects and equine operations, that land apply manure, whether they generate the manure or import it from another operation, are required by DEP regulations in Chapter 91.36 to have a written Manure Management Plan unless the land application is pursuant to a DEP permit or approval.

Q: How often does a MMP need to be updated?

A: As set forth in the Manual, the MMP must be evaluated by the owner/operator at least annually, and also updated any time the farmer wishes to use manure management practices or best management practices inconsistent with those in the current version of their MMP.

Q: How long should completed record forms be kept?

A: 3 years.

Q: Can Nutrient Balance Worksheets written by an Act 49 Certified Manure Broker Level 2 be used for a Manure Management Plan?

A: Yes, Nutrient Balance Worksheets are considered as meeting Manual requirements for the MMP Summary section. This is especially relevant to a farm that does not have animals of its own and only imports the manure the broker is working with. In this case the MMP is complete once the Nutrient Balance Worksheets are completed. But if the operation has its own animals that also need to be addressed in a MMP, the Nutrient Balance Worksheets developed by the broker can serve as the document to determine application rates and procedures (setbacks) for the manure the broker is assessing, but the remaining areas of the plan (Pasture Management, Animal Concentration Areas (ACA) Management, Manure Application Rates for the animals on the farm, etc.) need to be addressed through further documentation in the overall MMP for the farmer.

Q: The first page of section 1 includes “...prepared by...”? Does this include someone just doing the P-index or balance worksheets and not preparing the whole plan?

A: In the case where more than one person has written the MMP all names should appear.

Q: What are the accepted technical standards for taking and handling soil and manure sampling?

A: Follow the directions in the Penn State Agronomy Guide. Also, Agronomy Facts Sheet 69 is an excellent source of information on manure sampling. Sampling of soil and manure is not necessary for completion of the MMP. However, the practices are recommended, especially if more accurate balancing of manure nutrients is desired. Results from soil and manure testing can be used in a Nutrient Balance Worksheet to find application rates.

Q: If you have a MMP, you follow that plan, and you have manure run-off to a creek, would this be a violation?

A: It may be, if the plan did not follow MMP requirements or the plan was not implemented. If the plan was developed properly and implemented accordingly, but run-off to a stream occurred as a result of a large storm that could not be planned for such as a hurricane, then a violation would not likely be found.

Q: How close can manure be spread to a road-side ditch?

A: If a ditch is dry and only conveys flowing water after a rain event, setbacks do not apply. If the “ditch” usually contains flowing water at a time of year manure is applied stream setbacks apply. However, manure may not be applied in a non-vegetated waterway at any time of year.

Q: What is the responsibility of the manure exporter in tracking manure?

A: The manure exporter's responsibility ends when the manure is taken by the importer. The responsibility for the manure becomes the importer's when they receive the manure.

Q: Section 6 of the Manual provides the option of maintaining pastures to an average vegetative height of 3" growth during the growing season. What defines growing season and winter non-growing season?

A: The "growing season" is usually considered April to the end of October. However, if areas meet the criteria of an ACA any time of the year, they must be managed as an ACA during that time.

Q: Does stream bank fencing require a setback?

A: The DEP fencing program requires a 35' setback. If the fencing is to prevent streambank damage from animal activity, it may be reduced if the farmer is doing the fencing on his own. However, if the fencing is to restrict animal access to a stream from an existing ACA, the size of the ACA and site conditions must be taken into consideration to ensure that adequate filter capacity of the near stream vegetated area is enough to stop polluted water from the ACA from entering a water body.

Q: Are the Manure Application Rates listed on the MMP Summary good for only one year?

A: No, you can use the Manure Application Rates documented in this summary chart for multiple years if application rates are based on phosphorous removal or, if nitrogen-based, soil samples remain current (within 3 years) and show phosphorus levels less than 200 ppm (Mehlich 3-P). If either of those conditions are met, the Manure Application Rates documented in the summary chart can be used until there is a change in farm management requiring a change in the plan, at which time the most recent Manure Application Rate Tables should be used to develop new rates for the MMP Summary Chart. If the crop management and yield does not change, application rates listed on the summary chart can be used for the same crop as it is rotated to different fields. In this manner the rate is developed for a crop group not a specific field.

Q: Can the Manure Application Rates Tables in the back of the manual be used for multiple applications?

A: These tables can be used to figure a total amount of manure that can be applied over several applications during a given season as listed on the table. If an operator wants to apply manure in more than one application season as listed in the charts, that creates a need to go to the next level of planning, using the Manual Nutrient Balance Worksheets. The tables are not set up for multiple manures on multiple fields at multiple times. The farmer must use calculations outlined in the Manual Nutrient Balance Worksheets for this type of application rather than the tables. If the table selected manure application rate is above 9,000 gallons per acre then the application must be split with the second application occurring after the soil from the first application is dry and there is no manure crust covering the top soil.

Q: Can incorporation include ½ inch rainfall?

A: Yes, this is explained in the Penn State Agronomy Guide in the section where manure nutrient management is discussed. A slow, gentle rain is the best type of rain to incorporate manure nutrients because the rainwater will infiltrate the soil.

Q: Are there any tables for treated manure or compost?

A: No, you must use the calculations in the Manual Nutrient Balance Worksheets to determine application rates for these nutrient sources. You must first determine the nutrient content of the treated manure or compost separately and use those values in the Nutrient Balance Worksheet.

Q: Does vegetation for pastures have to be grass?

A: Vegetation considered as pastures would be a forage species. This includes many grasses but also includes some legumes such as clover.

Q: What tables for manure application rates should be used for mixed hay with legumes?

A: The tables for “Grass Hay” may be used for mixed hay with legumes.