Nonpoint Source Management Program :: Neuse Nutrient Strategy Agriculture Rule

What Does the Neuse River Agriculture Rule Say?

During the public hearing process, there was tremendous input from the agricultural community. The currently proposed rule reflects a consensus between the agricultural community and DWQ on how to effectively reach and account for the 30% nitrogen reduction goal while maximizing options for individual farmers. This strategy also dovetails with other agricultural initiatives, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Overall Strategy:

This rule affects all persons engaging in agricultural operations in the Neuse River basin.The rule provides each farmer with two options for reaching the nitrogen reduction goal:

1. Participate in a **Local Nitrogen Reduction Strategy** that would include specific plans for each farm that would collectively meet the nitrogen reduction goal, ***or***
2. Implement **Standard Best Management Practices** such as buffers, water control structures and nutrient management plans.

Option 1: Local Nitrogen Reduction Strategy

The process for the **Local Nitrogen Reduction Strategy** will depend on a number of committees: the Basin Oversight Committee and a Local Advisory Committees for each county or watershed.

Members of the **Basin Oversight Committee** will include DWQ and:

- The agricultural community
- The environmental community
- The scientific community
- Division of Soil and Water Conservation
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- N.C. Cooperative Extension Service

The major responsibilities of the **Basin Oversight Committee** are:

- Developing a method for tracking nitrogen loadings and reductions from farms.
- Refining calculations on the nitrogen loading from agricultural lands to the Neuse River.
- Allocating nitrogen reduction goals for each county/watershed in the basin
- Reviewing and approving county/watershed nitrogen reduction strategies.
- Presenting the above information to the Environmental Management Commission.

The **Local Advisory Committees** will work with farmers to tailor-make local nitrogen reduction strategies. Members of each Local Advisory Committee will include DWQ and:

- At least two local farmers
- County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Division of Soil and Water Conservation

The major responsibilities of the **Local Advisory Committees** are:

- Conducting the sign-up process for farmers.
- Developing local strategies to meet the county/watershed nitrogen reduction goal.
- Submitting annual progress reports to the Basin Oversight Committee.

Option 2: Standard BMP Strategy

If a farmer does not complete the sign-up process to participate in the Local Nitrogen Reduction Strategy, then he will fall under the **Standard Best Management Practice (BMP) Strategy.**

Under the Standard BMP Stategy, farmers will have four years after the effective date of the rule to implement practices to control nitrogen on their farms. This is the same time frame as for all of the other parties affected by the Neuse Nutrient Sensitive Waters Management Strategy.

The following table shows that the Standard BMP Strategy allows a number of different options for farmers to implement various combinations of riparian area protection, water control structures and nutrient management plans on their farms. The standard BMP options have been selected by DWQ staff in consultation with agriculture experts to maximize nitrogen reductions on farms.

Why is this the best way to reduce nitrogen from farms?

This Agricultural Nitrogen Reduction Strategy represents a new way of doing business for both the agricultural community and for DWQ. Rather than simply prescribing specific management practices on every farm, Option 1 encourages agricultural agencies and farmers to work together to find the most cost-effective and site-specific solutions for controlling nitrogen.

Another advantage of Option 1 is that it allows better prioritization and coordination of funding sources such as the state Agriculture Cost Share Program and the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The annual reporting process helps to ensure accountability for meeting the 30% reduction goal.

Option 2 is important to the strategy so that farmers that are not interested in the Local Nitrogen Reduction Strategy are not forced to participate.

Summary of Standard BMP Strategy (Option 2)

BMP(s) Implemented	Required Riparian area Zones and Vegetation / Width Options
Nutrient Management ***and*** Controlled Drainage	No Riparian Area Requirement
Nutrient Management ***or*** Controlled Drainage	20' Forested Riparian Area OR 30' Vegetated Filter Strip
Loss of Cropland Required for Receipt of Federal Tobacco	20' Forested Riparian Area AND 0' Vegetated Filter Strip
Neither of the following BMPs: Nutrient Management nor Controlled Drainage	30' Forested Riparian Area AND 20' Vegetated Filter Strip (Zones 1 and 2)

Neuse Agriculture Rule Annual Reports

- **New** Annual Progress Report of Neuse Agriculture Rule - Annual Report to EMC - WQC - November 13, 2008
- **New** Annual Progress Report on Neuse & Tar-Pamlico Agriculture Rule - Slide Presentation to EMC - WQC - November 13, 2008
- Annual Progress Report of Neuse Agriculture Rule - Annual Report to EMC - WQC - January 9, 2008 (pdf, 211Kb, 9pp)

- Annual Progress Report on Neuse & Tar-Pamlico Agriculture Rule - Slide Presentation to EMC - WQC - January 9, 2008 (ppt file, 3720Kb, 14 frames)