

Chapter 2:

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE PLANNING

SECTION ONE

PLAN TO MANAGE AND MANAGE TO PLAN

The most important step you can take as a farmer or producer is to plan. Planning is your way of preparing for the unexpected and reducing the risks associated with your operation. Ultimately, planning for the future will also improve your bottom line and improve your operation's efficiency.

In the same sense, it is essential that each operation have a farm plan that includes conservation elements. These conservation elements are your recorded strategies for protecting the natural resources that are on your farm. Through your conservation plan, you will incorporate management decisions that may include water quality BMPs into your farming operation. BMPs work best as a group rather than as individual practices. These practices work together to protect natural resources and reduce environmental impacts. For instance, by planning to incorporate BMPs into your cropping system, you will save irreplaceable soil that your crops thrive in. This soil can be lost in runoff from any number of farming activities or simply from natural occurrences such as excessive rainfall. You will also protect the quality of water that runs through your operation by reducing sediment and other contaminants entering water sources.

Many of the BMPs discussed in this manual are simply management decisions. Each agricultural operation is different, not only in the type of operation but also in farming practices, soils, water and organizational structure. Your conservation plan should be designed to meet the needs of your operation and should be specific to the concerns and impacts of your operation.

Planning takes time, but the time spent is well worth the cost of that time. When your plan is put into practice, it becomes a living plan that will need to be re-evaluated and adjusted regularly. A stagnant, unchanging plan will ultimately fail. Planning should begin with identifying priority issues. These priority issues should be areas where environmental impacts are significant. There will most likely be a number of issues on any farm that will need to be prioritized into a list of importance. This will help you focus your attention on correcting the more serious problems and then working on other areas with fewer impacts. By applying BMPs to these areas, you will be able to reduce environmental impacts and improve your overall operation.

Implementing a farm plan will take time. It cannot be completed overnight. In fact, the ideal conservation plan will never be completed because it will constantly be re-evaluated and improved. Priorities will change and operations will change. Your conservation elements should be adaptable to address new issues and to monitor those issues you've already addressed.

By keeping records, producers can identify weaknesses in their operation and work to strengthen those areas and improve efficiency. By becoming more efficient, profits can be increased and wasteful practices eliminated. Record keeping helps producers to plan and then implement any conservation, nutrient management or farm plan. This could potentially lower costs and save producers money in the long run.

On-farm records may include:

- Soil, manure and plant tissue testing results
- Seeding rates, depths, tillage style, weed problems, herbicide applications (frequency and amount), crop yields, etc.
- Livestock type and herd size
- Vaccine and veterinary records
- Equipment costs and maintenance
- Time frames for implementing BMPs
- Any water monitoring results

Record keeping can and should be tied into nutrient management planning as well. Any conservation agency can provide you with more information on nutrient management plans (NMPs) and requirements on record keeping for NMPs. Records can be handwritten or maintained on a computer. With lower costs, computers and computer software are an excellent means of accurately storing records and, depending on software programs, can make comparisons much easier. Initially, the time needed to learn computer software programs may be substantial, but it is worth the time cost in the long run. More information on nutrient management planning can be found in [Section 2](#) of this chapter.

Maintaining good farm records demonstrates a producer's commitment to his or her business and livelihood. Through records, the effectiveness of best management practices can be analyzed, and the efficiencies of your conservation efforts can be better understood.

Being a better manager of your natural resources makes you a better environmental steward. Protecting the natural resources in our state is essential to the sustainability of the agriculture industry in Georgia. This manual will provide you with general descriptions of numerous BMPs that impact water quality, and will hopefully serve as a source of information when you need assistance in developing or implementing your conservation plan.