

Partnerships for Livestock Environmental Management Systems

Livestock EMS Tools Leadership Team

The Partnerships for Livestock Environmental Management Systems project developed and evaluated a support system for producers to address priority environmental and health issues while sustaining their livestock enterprises. As part of this effort, the University of Nebraska leadership team developed and field-tested two products: producer and advisor-targeted guidebooks leading to a “Functional EMS,” and a comprehensive set of risk assessment tools. The tools are designed to be web accessible and in a format that will allow their modification for local situations or specific commodities. The producer and advisor guidebooks will also be published as part of the Livestock and Poultry Environmental Stewardship curriculum (<http://www.LPES.org>)

The first draft of the guidebook was developed with assistance from our national advisory committee and the larger Partnerships project team. It contained seven “lessons” with explanatory text, rationale and instructions for completing each step of an EMS. Updates were made based on in-depth training and review with our project team, advisory committee and guests at our annual team meeting. The project team members were encouraged to modify the materials to best fit their delivery methods and target audience.

Lessons learned

Successful implementation of an EMS will depend on the **ownership** producers have in developing their own plan. The project team reported that producers who put the most effort into their plan were more likely to identify potential benefits. Materials need to be user-friendly and to encourage producers to think of environmental management in personalized rather than generalized concepts.

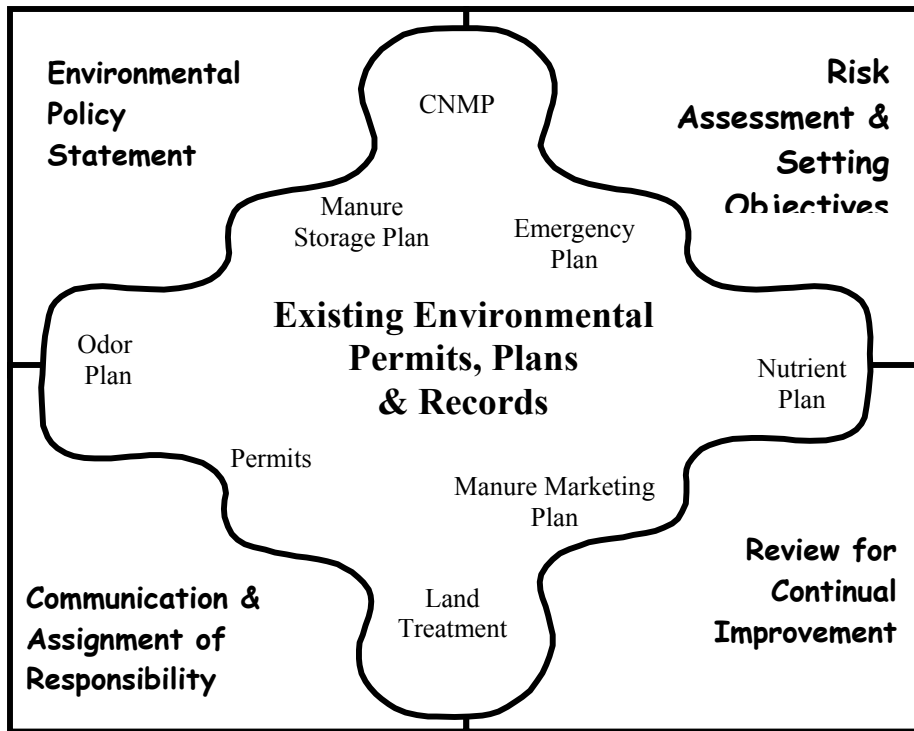
Guidance for EMS

"The Nebraska team's EMS guidebook was great. I would not have attempted to take 30+ producers through an EMS process without it."

-- John Lawrence
Iowa EMS Pilot Project

The EMS process needs to be “**farmer-ized**”, offering materials that reflect terminology, practices, and options that apply to agricultural production and business structure. Areas identified as roadblocks in the materials were often accompanied by the comment “This doesn’t apply to me.”

Integration with other on-farm environmental plans. Many livestock producers are required to have an odor plan, manure storage plan, emergency action plan and other plans to comply with current federal and state regulations. Involvement in USDA cost share programs often necessitates a conservation plan or a comprehensive nutrient management plan. What role will an EMS play within this mix of current planning expectations? Current planning processes have focused on implementing technical aspects such as the system design, practices, and records. These plans are the technical core of an EMS. Our EMS tools add the *management processes* to insure that the plan is implemented, meets the performance objectives and encourages continual improvement. (See Figure 1.)



position, improved relationships with neighbors and community, assurance of regulation compliance, and assurance of employee implementation of management expectations.

We have chosen to suggest to producers that there are **three levels of involvement in an EMS process**: 1) recognition of environmental risk through some type of assessment and improvement plan, 2) functional EMS which incorporates good stewardship and regulatory compliance with the ‘puzzle pieces’ illustrated in Figure 1, and 3) certified or ISO 14001 EMS which builds in additional elements that allow auditors to evaluate the progress of the EMS for the purpose of providing registration or incentives.

Figure 1: An EMS adds management processes to existing plans to assure successful implementation, improvement &

Less is more. The most common complaint about the materials was that they were too long. Feedback from the project team and participating producers highlighted the fact that an EMS is a process best learned by doing. As a result, we are re-organizing the EMS tools into a reference guidebook targeted toward educators and consultants. The producer-targeted workbook will include the sample worksheets and guides to assembling an EMS.

Incentives are needed. Unless greater incentives become available from the market place or regulatory community for ISO 14001 registration or other EMS recognition programs, producers will need to look for EMS value in their internal business objectives such as improved financial

Conclusion: Our team has developed a generic set of tools to assist producers and their coaches interested in adapting an ISO 14001 framework into a functional EMS. The guidebook or workbook tools specific to livestock and poultry producers were designed to allow local groups to modify them to better suit local conditions or local audiences. The tools guide producers through the development of an EMS designed to integrate management processes with existing permits and other environmental plans to improve their potential for success. However, the continued long-term use of an EMS on a farm or ranch will likely require that the incentives (both internal and external) received outweigh the additional effort required to maintain this process.