

New York Partnerships for Livestock Environmental Management Systems

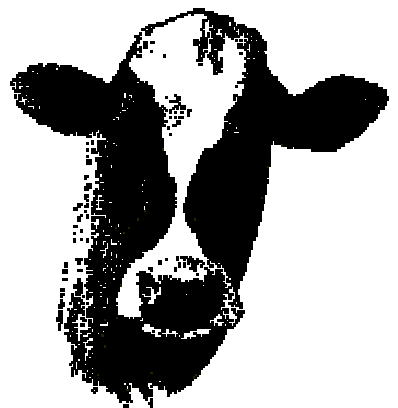
As early as 1996 agricultural stakeholders in NY recognized that farmers needed assistance in assessing their impact on the environment. This recognition was driven by the need to implement both a CAFO permit process and to meet EPA's Coastal Zone Reauthorization Act requirements. PRO-DAIRY, a statewide program of Cornell University that promotes farm management skills, focused its efforts on the agricultural environmental problems. An Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) system was designed with the involvement of all the federal and state programs as well as private entities. Groups included: USDA, NRCS, NY Department of Environmental Conservation, NY Dept. of State, NY Health Department, Dept. of Agriculture and Markets, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation Committee, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), as well as producer groups like the Northeast Dairy Producers Association and Farm Bureau and an environmental group, Citizen's Campaign for the Environment. New York's AEM consists of 5 tiers: Tier I: Information gathering, Tier II: Environmental Assessment, Tier III: Planning and Design, Tier IV: Implementation, and Tier V: Evaluation. These tiers relate to NRCS's 9-step planning process. Today over 6,000 farms in New York have started the AEM process by assessing their farms and over 1,000 farms have made changes in their operations. Most cost share programs include AEM participation as a criterion, and stakeholders have all been encouraging farms to participate.

One of the lessons learned from these experiences was that farmers need additional management skills to implement change and improve performance in targeted areas of production. Environmental improvement is no different. Farmers with a progressive long-term outlook recognize that they have to address their impacts on the environment and continually improve over time.

The New York Livestock Environmental Management Systems Pilot project designed a functional EMS framework to complement the EMS prescribed in the ISO 14001 process. The functional EMS streamlines the EMS process to get results quicker with less cumbersome documentation. The project also developed six Assessment Worksheets

for dairy operations. The Worksheets and the tailored functional EMS have helped make environmental management more accessible to dairy farm managers. The assessment tools focus on: Manure Storage, Pasture, Land Application of Manure, Farmstead-Manure and Related Effluents, Farmstead-Other Issues, Farm Nutrient Balance, Farm Nutrient Balance and Odors.

On five dairy farms, producers worked with an educator to pilot the



On EMS...

"EMS focuses our attention, our efforts, and achieves results on the environmental projects we need to implement in order to stay productive and be responsive to the needs of our neighbors. The process helps to bring about the needed changes we were thinking about."

Bill Cook,
Aurora Ridge Dairy

functional EMS framework, using the EMS guidebook developed by the Nebraska project team. Producers came up with policy statements defining their environmental commitment to comply with regulations and to continually improve. As they went through the worksheets to set their priorities based on perceived stakeholder values, odor control, and protection of surface and ground water quality were identified as most important. Other priorities included product safety, farm appearance, and improving internal and external communications.

All five farms had a CAFO plan created by a certified planner, and each one wanted to include their certified CAFO planner in the process, recognizing that the additional tactical planning, checking and evaluation were missing in the CAFO permit process. The farm managers used “tactical planning” worksheets that identified tasks to be accomplished, assigned responsibility, set timelines, gave conditions of quality, and checked for completion. The tactical planning worksheet translated decisions into actions for the farm. This process was much like the original PRO-DAIRY management process, except that it was focused on environmental improvement. Using the same management tools and skills farms had used to improve production, these farms now focused on their environmental management.

Findings

- The EMS process took a minimum of 16 hours with each farm. Much of the assessment process had already been completed for the CAFO plans (except for the non manure facilities assessment). This time commitment may preclude offering it as a free service from government agencies.
- Producers found the policy statement process very useful for focusing their ideas.
- Farmers’ motivations for pursuing an EMS included their visibility in the community, many employees in need of training, as well as a long-term interest in a sustainable business.

- The New York project also took the opportunity to use the national project’s evaluation protocols to evaluate a number of ongoing AEM programs being carried out by Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The results are forthcoming, but will be the first evaluations of the AEM program.
- A seminar with agricultural consultants was held January 6th 2004 in central New York to explore the potential of ISO 14001 and the use of the functional EMS framework. The 28 agricultural advisors who attended agreed that this process would be useful to some farms in achieving a higher level of environmental progress. They also cautioned that the process would take time and money to implement.
- The functional EMS framework, developed specifically for dairy farms, was presented at the January 2003 Dairy Housing Conference in Fort Worth, Texas to over 200 dairy farm advisors.
- NY AEM has adopted the air quality aspects of the EMS assessments developed by this project. This “Odor Assessment Worksheet” is being implemented statewide to help all farms going through the AEM process deal with potential odor issues.

Future Directions

The AEM process will continue to be the umbrella under which most of the environmental planning and implementation is done in New York. The EMS pilot program and the evaluations of AEM achieved during the pilot, complement these efforts. More emphasis will be placed on an on-farm management system to set priorities, implement the plans developed, and review and check the results. The guidebook and tools developed by this project will be needed to deliver an educational program to public and private agricultural consultants. With the steady assistance from these consultants, farms will be more capable of implementing operational changes and improving their environmental performance.



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