Best Management Practices for Florida Sod Operations

What are Best Management Practices?

Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) are practical measures that producers can take to reduce the amount of fertilizers, pesticides, animal waste, and other pollutants entering our water resources. They are designed to improve water quality while maintaining agricultural production.

Working with stakeholders, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) adopted a sod manual. The BMP manual covers key aspects of water quality and water conservation.

Typical practices include:

- **Nutrient Management** to determine nutrient needs and sources, and manage nutrient applications (including manure) to minimize impacts to water resources.
- **Irrigation Management** to address the method and scheduling of irrigation to reduce water and nutrient losses to the environment.
- **Water Resource Protection** using buffers, setbacks, and swales to reduce or prevent the transport of sediments and nutrients from production areas to waterbodies.

For assistance with enrolling in and implementing BMPs contact:

Call - (850) 617-1727 or Email - AgBMPHelp@FreshFromFlorida.com

FDACS staff, UF-IFAS Basin Area Team Extension agents, soil and water conservation districts, and USDA-NRCS can assist producers with BMP implementation and record-keeping methods.

After Enrolling in BMPs

An important part of BMP implementation is documenting it through record keeping, as specified in FDACS rules and BMP manuals. This is sometimes the only way to confirm BMP implementation. BMP records should be accurate, clear, and well-organized. You may develop your own record-keeping forms or use the ones provided in the manual.

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**Why should I implement BMPs?**

- Some BMPs can help you operate more efficiently and reduce costs, while you help protect the environment. Also, producers enrolled in FDACS BMP programs are eligible for cost-share, when available, for certain practices.
- Implementing (and maintaining) verified FDACS-adopted BMPs provides a presumption of compliance with state water quality standards for the pollutants addressed by the BMPs.
- BMP implementation provides protection under the Florida Right to Farm Act from duplicative local regulation.
- Producers who implement FDACS-adopted BMPs might satisfy some water management district permitting requirements. Check with your district.
- In areas with adopted basin management action plans (BMAPs), and some other designated areas, producers who implement BMPs avoid having to conduct costly water quality monitoring.
- BMP participation demonstrates agriculture’s commitment to water resource protection, and helps maintain support for this alternative approach.

**How do I participate in BMPs?**

1. Schedule a meeting with a BMP team member, who will provide a free FDACS BMP manual and other BMP-related information.
2. Participate with the team member in a free assessment of your operation, to determine which BMPs apply to you.
3. Fill out a BMP checklist and sign the Notice of Intent (NOI) to implement the BMPs.
4. Keep a copy of the checklist and signed NOI in your records.
5. Implement and maintain the applicable BMPs and keep adequate records, to maintain a presumption of compliance with state water quality standards.
6. If you would like to receive a Certificate of Enrollment in BMPs, contact FDACS at (850) 617-1727 or email AgBmpHelp@FreshFromFlorida.com.

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**Examples of Sod BMPs**

**Nutrient Management**
- Using tissue testing to determine the effectiveness of a fertilizer program, as well as needs for supplemental fertilization
- Calibrating fertilizer equipment for uniform distribution
- Using split applications for soluble fertilizer
- If using reclaimed water, adjusting fertilization rates to account for the nutrient content in the reclaimed water, based on the water quality data from the water supplier
- Adjusting fertilizer rate if using composted manures, treated domestic wasteware residuals, or other biosolids

**Irrigation Scheduling**
- Determining the available soil moisture content and maintaining soil moisture within the recommended range for the crop and soil type, in order to reduce possibility of over irrigation or leaching
- Adjusting irrigation timing and amount to account for rainfall events and growth stage of the turfgrass

**Irrigation System Maintenance and Evaluation**
- Periodically checking system uniformity
- Establishing a written schedule for inspection and maintenance of all irrigation system components

**Wellhead Protection**
- Reviewing local comprehensive plan to determine if land uses within wellhead protection areas conform to local codes
- Using backflow-prevention devices at the wellhead to prevent contamination of water sources

**Wetlands and Springs Protection**
- Maintaining a 25-foot undisturbed upland buffer exterior to the landward extent of all perennial watercourses and associated adjacent wetlands

**Mowing Management**
- Establishing a mowing frequency to maintain optimal turf growth
- Recycling, composting, or disposing of clippings in an environmentally acceptable fashion

**Integrated Pest Management**
- Storing pesticides in an enclosed, roofed structure with an impervious floor and lockable door at least 100 feet away from surface waters