



GENERAL INFORMATION

Meeting the Fertilizer Requirements of the Springs and Aquifer Protection Act

In 2016, the Florida Legislature identified 30 “Outstanding Florida Springs” that require additional protections to ensure their conservation and restoration for future generations. These protections will be outlined in restoration plans, known as Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs). These plans are focused on reducing nitrogen pollution that is impacting the water quality of these springs.

Nutrients, specifically nitrogen and phosphorous, are naturally present in the water and necessary for the healthy growth of plant and animal life. However, too much nitrogen or phosphorous can harm water quality. Excess nutrients can come from insufficient treatment at wastewater treatment facilities, stormwater runoff, densely clustered septic systems and fertilizer lost to the environment.

The legislation requires each BMAP to identify the sources of nitrogen pollution within the springshed, and include projects and strategies that will achieve the reductions needed to improve water quality in the region.

Local Fertilizer Ordinances

The law requires local governments within a BMAP to adopt ordinances that regulate the residential use of fertilizers. By July 1, 2017, all local governments were required to develop, enact, and implement ordinances that meet the Model Ordinance for Florida-Friendly Fertilizer Use on Urban Landscapes. If necessary, local governments may adopt additional requirements to adequately address urban fertilizer pollution.

Agricultural Operations

Under the law, agricultural operations in areas with adopted BMAP plans (including BMAPs for Outstanding Florida Springs) are required to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) from the manuals adopted by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), or monitor water quality.

Agricultural 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. FDACS has adopted BMPs for most commodities in the state. Each BMP manual covers key aspects of water quality and water conservation. Typical practices include:

- Nutrient Management to determine nutrient needs and sources, while managing 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.

FDACS works with multiple partners, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida’s water management districts, and Florida’s soil and water conservation districts, to provide funds that assist producers in implementing Best Management Practices.