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Environmental Assurance Program

Jill Lorenz-Goodrich
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Summary and Implications

The popular press has brought environmental challenges in the pork industry to the forefront, making the pork industry a key political issue in several states. In Nebraska, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality and the Nebraska Pork Producers Association have been cooperators in providing educational opportunities to producers on how they can meeting the state's regulations and ensuring production in an environmentally safe manner. The National Pork Producers Council is a partner in this effort through the development of a national curriculum called the Environmental Assurance Program. This educational program stresses the fundamentals of protecting natural resources as well as on-farm management practices and tips to help producers manage their operations in harmony with the land. The Nebraska Pork Producers Association, in cooperation with local pork producer associations and extension offices, will make this program available through workshops emphasizing local cooperation and enhancing a sense of teamwork between producers, local government and environmental agencies.

What is Environmental Assurance?

The goal of the Environmental Assurance Program is to provide producers with the environmental knowledge they need to operate profitably. Since every producer has unique needs,

the program is flexible and allows producers to adapt the information having the greatest impact on their operation.

Written by and for pork producers, the Environmental Assurance Program is a voluntary program with two primary components. The first is a workshop led by local experts and the second is an on-farm environmental assessment the producer does individually. Here are the benefits producers receive:

Confidence -- When producers evaluate their own environmental management techniques and learn new ones, they gain confidence in their abilities.

Profits -- Efficient nutrient management can reduce the need for commercial fertilizer and add to the operation's bottom line.

Reduce Problems -- Taking action, rather than reaction, will help avoid problems that might result in nuisance suits or other legal actions.

Enhance Relationships -- Establishing and maintaining good relationships with neighbors and showing that an operation is environmentally friendly is important to the long-term success of the pork industry.

Program Components

Knowing Where You Stand. At the beginning of the program, producers take a survey of their operation to establish their current situation. This component is designed to help producers understand how their operation currently ranks on the environmental stewardship scale.

Understanding Fundamentals. Water, air, nutrient and facility management comprise the key topics of the program workshops. These sessions explain the fundamentals of environmentally sensitive management tech-

niques and implementation of cost-effective practices for profitable pork production.

Learning About Regulations. Industry regulations are complex. This session provides ideas on how to avoid problems, rather than react to them.

Evaluating Yourself. The most important part of the workshop comes when producers thoroughly review their own operations after they leave the workshop. The on-farm, self-assessment in the curriculum is designed to guide the producer in improving the operation's efficiency and profits. It will also help producers to identify practices to improve their stewardship of the environment.

Knowledge is Power

Knowledge is power for today's pork producer. Learning how to protect the environment pays off in both short and long-term dividends. Short-term dividends, like improved profits, reduced problems and enhanced relationships, can go straight to an operation's bottom line. Equally important, the long-term growth of the entire pork industry will be directly affected by the sensitivity, knowledge and action each producer directs toward protecting the environment. For more information about the Environmental Assurance Program, contact the Nebraska Pork Producers Association, Inc., at (402) 472-2563 or Dr. Rick Koelsch at the University of Nebraska at (402) 472-4051.

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