

Florida's Bevy of BMP Manuals: Voluntary Programs to Protect Water Resources

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Florida has developed more than a dozen Best Management Practice (BMP) manuals. A BMP manual is a user-friendly tool to help producers implement conservation practices that reduce agricultural non-point source pollution. Entities involved in manual development include the Florida Dept. of Agriculture Office of Ag Water Policy, the Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection, Water Management Districts, grower associations, Florida producers, environmental groups, and ag fertilizer & chemical suppliers. Manuals are developed by identifying a need, forming a steering committee, defining agency roles, and forming technical workgroups to write the draft manual. After a draft is produced, the text is peer-reviewed and public workshops are held to solicit further comments and suggestions. Finally, the manual is adopted in state code and is distributed to clients. State and federal cost-share funds are available to assist producers with implementing BMPs that are costly. The BMP process incorporates university expertise, contracting the Univ. of Florida and Florida A&M Univ. to work on nitrate reduction in groundwater, nutrient reduction in surface waters, and other collaborative ventures such as computer models that predict load reductions resulting from BMP implementation. Producers participating in BMP programs gain a presumption of compliance with water quality standards, which provides a measure of protection against accusations of water pollution. Several of the drainage infrastructure improvement BMPs also qualify for permit exemptions from Water Management Districts.