

Step 1. SET GOALS

Nutrient management plans are developed for many different reasons. Yours may include one or more of the following:

- ▶ evaluate land base needs because you're planning to expand your livestock operation
- ▶ optimize economic yields
- ▶ manage input costs
- ▶ protect soil and water resources
- ▶ comply with nutrient management regulations.

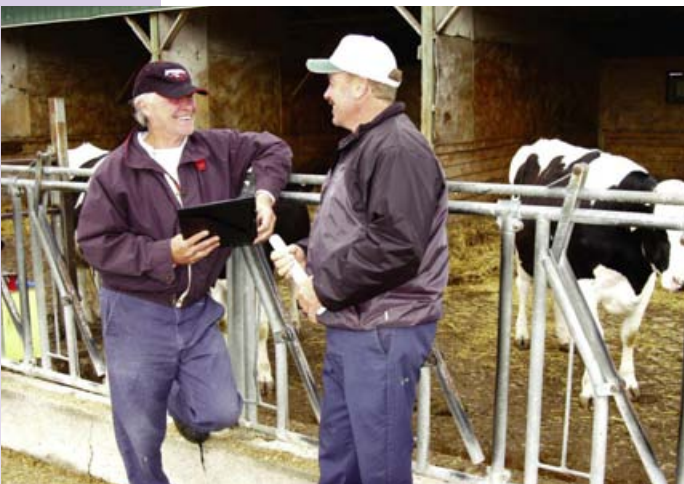
Identify which of these or other reasons relate to your farming operation now so that you can continue to focus on these throughout the planning process.

CONSIDERATIONS

Business

Ask yourself: where will the operation be in five and 10 years, and how will that impact the nutrient management plan goals?

If you're considering future expansion, can the nutrient management plan be proactive in addressing some of the requirements (e.g., calculating land base requirements or arranging manure agreements)?



Set goals with partners and family members.

Family

Who in the family will be directly involved in the nutrient management plan? When it comes to nutrient management planning, are your goals and the goals of family members in accord?

Practicality

A nutrient management plan has to be practical. If it costs too much to implement, or if it can't be followed because the farm lacks the infrastructure to carry out the plan (e.g., equipment can't meet the application requirements), then the plan must be reconsidered.

Stewardship

Which environmental goals are you seeking to address? Surface water or groundwater protection? Improved soil or air quality? Many planned best management practices will lead to environmental improvements for several resources. Others will only protect one resource. For example, runoff control is an important goal, but won't necessarily protect groundwater resources.

Experience of others

Who do you know who has already completed a nutrient management plan for some of the same reasons you're considering? Relying on others' experiences of the process could help you set realistic goals and actions for your plan.

Trusted advice

Some people quickly discover they don't have all the background or the time to complete a plan. Some operators use their time and expertise with the livestock portion of the operation, and rely on others for the cropping components of their operation. Who do you trust to help you complete the plan?

If you're less than comfortable with compiling the data required for your plan, or have a complex farm operation, you might consider hiring help or creating a team of advisors (e.g., livestock nutritionist, custom manure applicator, consultant, hired help) to assist you.

One of the biggest advantages of using a consultant is that they're a fresh pair of eyes and often able to see the big picture more quickly than someone involved in your day-to-day farm operation. Different levels of service are offered in nutrient management planning, and are often reflected in the cost. Decide what you need and how much you're willing to pay before hiring outside help.



Seek advice from the leading-edge producers and technical specialists you trust.