FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

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Source Water Protection Program

Overview

The Source Water Protection Program, a joint project by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the nonprofit National Rural Water Association (NRWA), is designed to help prevent source water pollution in 44 states through voluntary practices installed by producers at the local level.

The program is authorized by amendments to Sec. 12400 of the 1985 Farm Bill that were included in Sec. 2502 of the 2002 Farm Bill. Source water is surface and ground water that is consumed by rural residents. According to the NRWA, ground water is the primary source of drinking water for some 44,000 communities in the United States.

How the Program Works

NRWA has implemented the Source Water Protection Program, with oversight and assistance by FSA. Through the program, NRWA hires, for every participating state, full-time rural source water technicians who possess knowledge and experience in rural issues. The technicians work with FSA state executive directors, FSA county executive directors and state conservation specialists with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to create operating plans that identify priority areas where local pollution prevention efforts are needed most in their respective states. Working with state rural water associations, technicians will also facilitate the creation of local teams comprised of citizens with diverse backgrounds from federal, state, local and private entities. These teams collaborate in the development of Rural Source Water Protection plans that promote clean ground water. The technicians assist the teams in gathering local data and facilitate a planning workshop. The purpose of the workshop is to create a plan that includes, but is not be limited to, developing the following:

- A map outlining the affected area;
- An inventory of potential contaminant sources;
- A definition of areas that match up with entities and organizations;
- A definition of voluntary measures that may be initiated;
- Identification of public education initiatives; and
- Identification of entities and resources that will facilitate implementation of the plan and its sustainability.

Rural Source Water Protection plans outline voluntary measures that farmers and ranchers can install on their lands to prevent source water pollution. Voluntary measures may range from producers storing herbicides, pesticides or other substances in more secure containers to relocating waste lagoons. By working at the grassroots level, local team members inform and educate producers about source water protection measures that benefit their neighbors and communities. Additionally, the plans establish steering committees to evaluate voluntary practices implemented by local producers. FSA monitors the overall performance of the program.

Participating States

The program has been implemented in the following states: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The 44 states participating in the Source Water Protection Program were chosen based on objective technical criteria relating to water quality and population.

Who Can Participate

Farmers and ranchers in the aforementioned states are encouraged to participate in the Source Water Protection Program. They can take part in the program by administering voluntary practices on their land and/or by becoming team members responsible for the development of Rural Source Water Protection plans. Citizens from federal, state, local and private entities also can serve on local teams.

Information about NRWA

NRWA was established in 1976 as a nonprofit, utility membership, trade association to represent rural and small community water and wastewater systems. Today, NRWA is the largest utility member-based organization in the country serving in 48 contiguous states, as well as Alaska and Puerto Rico with more than 23,500 members.

For More Information

For more information about FSA programs, visit: http:www.fsa.usda.gov.

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