

AGRICULTURE SECTOR WORKING GROUP – MEETING MINUTES

APRIL 26, 2016

1:30 PM – 4:00 PM

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Introduction

Government co-chair of the working group, George McCaw, introduced industry co-chair, Bruce Kelly (Farm and Food Care Ontario), reminded the members that the group is a discussion forum and not a decision-making body, and encouraged them to share information, speak from experience and keep it informal. The government co-chair also invited comments on the minutes from the first working group meeting and there were none.

Presentation 1: Reducing Phosphorus Loss to Lake Erie: Application and Timing of Nutrients (Matt Wilson)

The presentation raised several questions and the following is a summary of the discussion.

- Related to ASM, about 6,000 farms have a Nutrient Management Strategy and about 1,000 farms have a Nutrient Management Plan; the information on acreage is not readily available
Action Item: Matt to follow up with information on acreage if available
- The *Nutrient Management Act* is fairly comprehensive and contains numerous requirements that addresses phosphorus, including standards for manure storage and winter spreading restrictions; however, to the requirements do not apply to all farms and some apply only to a farm specified unit
- A question was brought up whether there are any studies / reports on effectiveness of winter spreading restrictions on phosphorus reduction
- WG members also asked for the slides
Action Item: OMAFRA to share the presentation with Working Group members

Discussion 1

Discussion question: What do you see as the most significant challenges and implications to producers taking action to reduce or eliminate non-growing season application of nutrients?

Working group members were divided in four groups. Each group discussed the question and reported key findings. Below is a summary of key findings from all groups organized into themes.

Awareness / Knowledge

- Behavioral mindset; manure is sometimes not seen as a resource; producers may not be aware of the value of manure
- Producers may not be aware of the impact of their actions, and options they have for dealing with manure
- Producers do not think about or plan for in-crop application of manure / fertilizer
- Lack of knowledge about how much manure storage is needed
- General public is unaware of farmers' time constraints

Economics / Cost

- Lack of manure storage; the cost of building it
- Delay of seeding for spreading manure in spring leads to yield lowered and revenues reduced
- Cost and reliability of soil testing and the issue of its reliability (if inaccurate results used to balance nutrients – can lead to yield loss)
- For producers over 55 it may not make economic sense to invest in storage space

Time-related

- Finite number of days to spread manure; fear of wet season; 'spring rush'
- Ag retailers may not be able to deliver all product needed if winter application is prohibited
- Most nutrients are applied in pre or post growing season
- Late harvests, wet conditions and the production of corn year after year greatly reduce the opportunity for growing season spreading. Growers need to make a plan to create more opportunities to spread during the growing season
- Defining non-growing season (Is it December 1 – March 31? Or when ground is frozen / snow covered? Or when cannot incorporate?)

Other Challenges

- Uncovered manure storage is less predictable and may create problems under extreme precipitation events
- Evidence of how many farmers applying in fall or winter and therefore how much phosphorus reduction a ban would accrue

- Nutrient Management legislative requirements (including Nutrient Management Plans) not mandatory for all producers
- Targeting needs to be based on analysis (e.g. how much phosphorus is lost from farms up-stream vs. farms closer to surface water / lake)
- Difference between livestock sectors re storage capacity and storage needs
- Need to consider nitrogen onto winter wheat when ground frozen
- There may be limited technologies for application of manure
- How do our phosphorus incorporation strategies mesh with benefits of no till?
- Need for integration with climate change; need to sequester carbon and prevent phosphorus stratification
- Issues with municipal compost spread / stored on fields

Presentation 2: Tools to Drive Change (George McCaw)

The presentation raised a few points for clarification.

- This Domestic Action Plan is being developed for Lake Erie. We have load reduction targets for Western and Central basins of Lake Erie. Targets for Eastern Lake Erie are also being developed. The actions developed may be targeted to Lake Erie or may be province-wide.
- Tools and actions can be municipal, provincial, federal, but also sectoral and organizational (e.g. agriculture organizations, environmental organizations)

Discussion 2

Discussion questions: What do we need to do differently to achieve a significant reduction in nutrient application in the non-growing season? Is there any other information you would like to provide to help inform decision-making on the issue?

Working group members were divided in the same four groups as for Discussion 1. Each group discussed the questions and key findings were reported. Below is a summary of key findings from all groups organized into themes.

Knowledge / Information

- Understand the problem ; messaging / audience / tools are different based on answers
 - If for storage reasons – need incentives
 - If because it is convenient – need to educate producers
- **Action item for all:** Ask producers why they are spreading in winter
- Need to work with innovative farms, whole systems approach, accompanied with monitoring so that producers see the need for change
- Need effective monitoring of tributaries and edge of field to assess effectiveness of practices

- Need to address data challenge: need to collect more – and more precise data (potential sources: AgriCorp, EFP, Farm Health Check-up – existing programs and delivery agents)
- Need information on how much winter spreading is taking place in high priority areas
- Define ‘significant reductions’

Agronomic / Operational

- Create more opportunities for within growing season spreading
- Crop rotations – plan for them so that they allow for non-winter spreading
- Growing season manure exchange – what would the system look like? Facilitate a market/exchange of manure between those with too much and those with crop fertility needs.
 - Need to identify challenges (producers who have extra manure to export, biosecurity, etc.). May need intermediate storage tank. If the approach works for biosolids – why not have a system for manure?

Legislation / Regulation

- Address mix messages re NMA:
 - Approach to temporary winter storage (is it OK?) vs. winter spreading (it is not)
 - If winter spreading is bad – why not ban it?
- Specific regulations (nutrients, non-growing season) – phase in or pilot restrictions in Lake Erie then monitor
- Understand impact of potential further restrictions on affected areas, producers and retailers

Communications

- Need to explain to producers the concerns with winter spreading and strongly discourage the practice
- Need multi-sector industry organization messaging to lead change; it is more credible than government messaging but needs consistency
- Communicate to the sector that regulations (further restrictions on winter spreading) may be coming – give producers opportunity to change

Other

- Need multi-pronged approach for the non-growing season problem
- Need to address disparities among farms (e.g. phased-in vs. not; livestock vs. cash-crop; certified vs. non-certified; geography ((Western and Central) Lake Erie Basin vs. the rest of the province)
- Need flexibility to deal with weather

Wrap-Up

George McCaw shared a proposed list of topics for future meetings. A number of comments and suggestions were made; highlights provided below.

- Need to include in the meeting agenda items that will address the root of the problem: how to get studies, monitoring, data, modelling, that will allow us to report progress that we are making
- There is interest in future meetings to have presentations on what actors within the sector are doing but the group also sees the benefit of discussions. It would be helpful to get discussion questions further in advance
Action item: For future discussions circulate questions further in advance (e.g. a week)
- The group is interested in a tour (that would include the sector and MOECC and OMAFRA policy staff. Farm and Food Care is developing a proposal for a day trip to take place in June. In addition to good farms, the tour should include an agri-retailer.
Action item: WG members to respond to co-chairs about interest in a tour

A comment was made about the need to have agriculture organizations and their boards up to date. A response was that boards and sector organizations are involved and that numerous industry discussions about phosphorus are taking place. The message is that Working Group members need to keep engaging broadly within their organizations.