

THE BMP CHALLENGE

March 2012

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**Questions? Comments?
Contact Rebecca Ressler,
Project Coordinator, at (608) 232-1425 or
rebecca.ressl@bmpchallenge.org or visit
www.bmpchallenge.org**

NEW STATE: The BMP CHALLENGE is now available in Vermont.
Interested in enrolling your state? Contact us to start the process today.

UPCOMING EVENT: Soil and Water Conservation Society's 67th Annual International Conference "Choosing Conservation: Considering Ecology, Economics, and Ethics" July 22-25, 2012 in Forth Worth, TX

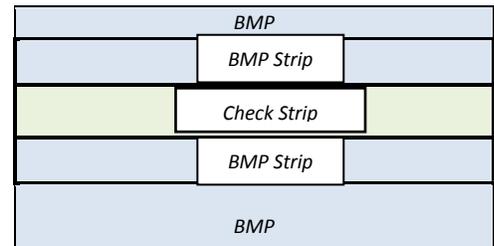
BMP CHALLENGE will be hosting a symposium on "Addressing the Adoption Challenge." Presenters include, Brian Brandt for the BMP CHALLENGE, Brian Williams for the Nutrient Management Initiative, Tom Green for the Great Lakes Protection Fund ag retailer projects in the Sandusky River Watershed, and Pete Nowak of WI Buffer Initiative.

Enrollment Open for BMP CHALLENGE Risk Free Guarantee Program

The BMP CHALLENGE now accepting applications for the 2012 growing season!

With real income on the line, farmers can be reluctant to try new practices. Income guarantees can ease the transition. Since its pilot program in 2000, the BMP CHALLENGE has helped corn producers on over 18,000 acres experiment with conservation practices on their farms, without risk to income.

The BMP CHALLENGE is easy from start to finish. Working with a crop advisor or conservation professional, the farmer selects one or two fields, up to 100 acres each, to enroll. He or she sets up a check strip in those fields using a protocol written to increase comparability. He or she applies traditional nutrient rates or tillage practice on the check strip. The remainder of the fields receives BMP nutrient rates or reduced tillage. At harvest, the farmer and advisor compare and report yields. We then calculate the farmer's net return, accounting for fertilizer or equipment cost-savings, and compensate the farmer for any net income loss.



The program is available to EQIP-eligible producers that grow corn for grain, silage or sweet corn in CA, DE, IA, ID, IL, IN, MD, MI, MN, MO, NC, NE, NY, OH, PA, SD, VA, VT or WI. Eligible practices include reduced tillage, basic N, P or K reduction, pre side-dress nitrate testing, corn stalk nitrate testing, minimum disturbance incorporation, manure injection, N inhibitor or enhanced N products, and sensor based variable rate applications. Let us know if you are interested in testing another practice.

Applications for the 2012 growing season can be found on the [BMP CHALLENGE website](#). In order to enroll fields in the 2012 BMP CHALLENGE, please send in an application or contact Rebecca Ressler at either rebecca.ressl@bmpchallenge.org or (608) 232-1425.

USDA Risk Management Agency 2012 Corn Price Set

For corn grown for grain in 2012, the BMP CHALLENGE program will use the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) additional price election of \$5.68 per bushel to compensate participating corn producers. Prices of corn grown for silage vary by region and range from \$40.25-\$50.00 per ton.

These corn prices are factored into the net returns analysis to determine if a payment is due to participating farmers. Any loss in yield and income is weighed against farmer savings in tillage or fertilizer costs to determine net returns. For example calculations, visit the [Nutrient BMP CHALLENGE](#) and [Reduced Tillage CHALLENGE](#) web pages.

Crop advisor compensation increased to \$6/acre for Nutrient Management and \$9/acre for Reduced Tillage. For 2012, due to a new funding opportunity, Minnesota crop advisors receive \$400 for each field enrolled, and \$700 per field for setting up the check-strip, assisting at harvest and reporting all information. Fill out a [Crop Advisor Agreement](#) today.

BMP CHALLENGE – The Bigger Picture

In 2011, Agflex, American Farmland Trust, Kieser & Associates and many others, with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, compiled a comprehensive report on the effectiveness of the BMP CHALLENGE program. Participants in the Nutrient BMP CHALLENGE from 2000-2010 contributed to an N application reduction of 180,400 pounds, an average of 37.4 pounds per acre. Even though farmers on average experienced a loss, 60% of farmers broke even or had positive net returns. The average loss was 6.7 bushels per acre, which translates to an average loss of \$4.86 per acre. Many farmers suggested that the negative impact on yields could be due to university recommendation possibly not keeping pace with the new improved plant genetics requiring additional N. Other factors may include that most nutrient management plans used a static N rate (e.g. 1.2 pounds of N per bushel expected yield), which does not take into account the increasing economic return for N applications as corn prices increase, or all possible opportunities to improve N-use efficiency such as split applications or controlled release formulations. It is also important to note that university-developed BMPs are not necessarily designed to maximize yields, but to optimize net income over time. Nevertheless, results show that the BMP CHALLENGE is still cost-efficient in N load reductions compared to other similar programs.

The feasibility study also addressed the results of the Planned Nitrogen Reduction (PNR) program. The PNR program, like the Nutrient BMP CHALLENGE and Reduced Tillage BMP CHALLENGE, used a comparison strip to determine net returns, and provided a guarantee. Instead of using the state's recommended BMP rates though, farmers in the PNR program applied N an average of 15% below land grant university recommendations. The 100 enrolled fields across 9000 acres reduced N by over 244,000 pounds in fertilizer applications, and by 70,800 pounds (7.8 pounds per acre) in loads to the Chesapeake Bay. As expected, applying N at an average of 27 pounds *below* state recommendations led to reduced yields and negative net returns.

Potential for increasing net returns may occur through splitting N applications, incorporating variable rate application technology or developing a water quality trading system. Overall, producers were overwhelmingly satisfied with tier experiences. Survey responses indicate that 89% were satisfied that their income had been protected, and 97% said the method to determine net returns and calculate guarantee payments was accurate and fair. Furthermore, 87% of responding past participants for nutrient management indicated they use the BMP or a modified version on their fields on an average of 60% of their acreage. Comments included, "I think this program is a fantastic approach to implement solutions to cleaning up the bay. It takes the worry out of changing management practices that directly affect yield/income," and, "It is a win-win situation. I can try new practices with little risk."

Thank you to all of the farmers and crop advisors that participated in the BMP CHALLENGE. As shown by the feasibility study, you have made a substantial difference in reducing nutrient loads, and are contributing to the further development of BMP recommendations.

Webinar for Ag Professionals March 27th

American Farmland Trust and Agflex Inc. invite you to participate in a short BMP CHALLENGE webinar to prepare for the 2012 crop season demonstrations. Our hope is to provide key details to prospective advisors in a convenient and efficient format and, subsequently boost enrollment.

WHEN: Tuesday March 27, 11am–12pm EDT (DE, MD, PA, VA) and 1–2pm CDT (all other states)

WHERE: Comfort of your own computer or cell phone (listen only)

AGENDA:

1. Review the "WHAT," "WHY" and "WHERE is it going" of the program
2. Discuss eligible practices, recruitment targets and crop advisor compensation
3. Review 2012 program forms to reduce your time on paperwork
4. Answer your questions and take your feedback

REGISTER NOW:

[Targeted Application of the BMP Challenge in the Mid-Atlantic \(DE, MD, PA, VA\)](#)
[Targeted Application of the BMP Challenge \(all other states\)](#)