

Wisconsin DATCP: Plan to spread? Look ahead

Posted on Wednesday, Mar 1, 2017

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MADISON - With an early spring looking like a good possibility, Wisconsin agriculture officials are asking farmers to check the Runoff Risk Advisory Forecast online before spreading manure.

They encourage farmers to avoid spreading manure during high-risk runoff times. If farmers must spread manure during such times, they should steer clear of high risk fields and have a spill response plan in place.

"Farmers are eager to get their manure pits cleaned out after the winter, we understand. But it's equally important to spread manure when and where it will remain to fertilize the crop and protect lakes, streams and groundwater," says Sara Walling, water quality section leader with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. "The online runoff risk advisory maps will give them a day-by-day forecast out 10 days, so they can avoid spreading, or if they must spread manure during that time, can take steps to minimize the risk of runoff."

The Runoff Risk Advisory Forecast is part of the Wisconsin Manure Management Advisory System, available at manureadvisorysystem.wi.gov. The runoff forecast provides maps showing short-term runoff risk for daily application planning, taking into account factors including soil moisture, weather forecast, crop cover, snow cover, and slope. It is updated three times daily by the National Weather Service.

Farmers should contact their crop consultants or county land conservation offices for help

identifying alternatives to spreading, such as stacking manure away from lakes or rivers, drinking water wells, or area with sinkholes or exposed bedrock. If farmers must spread manure, crop consultants and county conservationists can help identify fields where the risk is lower. You can find contact information for county conservation offices in the WI Land + Water Directory at <http://wisconsinlandwater.org>.

While discouraging spreading during high-risk times, Walling also advises farmers to have an emergency plan in any case. The plan should include who to call and what steps to take if runoff or a spill occurs, how to clean it up, and perhaps most important, how to prevent it from happening. Information about preventing and planning for manure spills is available at <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/agbusiness/manurespills.html>.