

**Oregon Department of Agriculture's Water Quality Program
Demonstrating Area Plan Effectiveness through Focused Efforts
Frequently Asked Questions (Version 1 – Updated 2/29/12)**

In response to feedback from our partners and stakeholders, ODA has developed the following document to further describe the proposed concept of demonstrating effectiveness of implementing the Agricultural Water Quality Management Act. This document may be revised to address additional feedback.

What is driving the need to focus efforts for effectiveness?

Recent focus at state and national levels on water quality is driving the need to document effectiveness of the state Agricultural Water Quality Management Program (Program). The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) is not unique in this regard – agencies and the agricultural industry are being asked to better demonstrate cumulative effectiveness of water quality activities by Congress, funding agencies, researchers, and the public. Oregon agriculture and ODA must be able to show that collectively, the work on the ground is effective in meeting state water quality goals at the watershed level.

The Program is responsible for developing and implementing agricultural pollution prevention and control plans (Area Plans) to protect the quality of Oregon's waters. The Program evolved in response to water quality programs and requirements under various state and federal laws, such as the Clean Water Act. ODA needs to document how well agriculture is meeting load allocations in Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) through the implementation of these Area Plans. A process is needed to document that agriculture is effectively implementing actions to achieve load allocations.

Stakeholders ranging from Local Advisory Committee (LAC) members to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) have also expressed interest in land condition or water quality monitoring data that provides an assessment of landscape or water quality improvements. Focused work will aid in this assessment and will assist LACs and other stakeholders to better evaluate the effectiveness of Area Plans.

Who is responsible for measuring and reporting on the indicators of Program effectiveness?

Ultimately, ODA is responsible for measuring and reporting on the implementation of the Program. However, ODA relies on partnerships with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and other conservation partners to provide information that can be used to assess the Program. The importance of local efforts has been recognized by the Oregon Legislature through its ongoing obligation of funding to SWCDs to assist with implementation of the Program.

Are changes needed in our current monitoring and reporting efforts to ensure ODA has sufficient information to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Program in the future?

The short answer is yes. Present monitoring does not provide an aggregated view of the influence agriculture is having on land conditions that affect water quality. The Program needs to relate implementation actions to land conditions to learn how much land is in a condition that protects water quality and how much land may require improvements.

Priority or focus areas provide an approach for assessing small geographic areas (e.g. 6th field watersheds) and assist in documenting effectiveness of landowner activities in the implementation of the Area Plan goals and objectives. Priority or focus areas may be chosen for reasons such as: (1) there are significant water quality concerns likely associated with agricultural activities, (2) SWCDs and other partners are already working with many landowners in the area, and/or (3) the size of the location matches local

capacity to work in the entire area in a reasonable time frame. The results of these focused efforts will be evaluated during the biennial review process.

What is missing from currently available information that is preventing ODA from telling a success story about the Program?

To date, there has been little systematic evaluation of whether numerous individual activities and projects have added up to create improvements in water quality or in the landscape conditions that affect water quality in agricultural areas. For years, SWCDs have shown great interest in documenting effectiveness of implementation efforts, and ODA has received data on implementation activities and projects, such as numbers of off-stream watering systems installed or acres of land converted to no-till. A comprehensive evaluation and assessment of land and/or water conditions to document to what extent local Area Plans and individual efforts are achieving the intended goals and objectives is necessary.

What indicators should be monitored and what measures should be used to determine if progress is being made toward meeting the objectives of the Program?

ODA believes an assessment of both land conditions and in some cases, water quality data, is essential to demonstrate progress toward meeting the goals and objectives of the Program.

By focusing on small geographic areas, ODA believes it can effectively document agriculture's efforts in meeting state water quality goals and objectives. Focusing on small areas provides a tool to show what agriculture is doing on the ground through documenting landscape conditions in a way that can be measured effectively and evaluated in a relatively short timeframe.

Examples of measures focusing on small areas may include: percentage of stream miles with appropriate vegetation for streambank stability; percentage of livestock facilities (both permitted and not needing a permit) with appropriate waste control mechanisms; percent of cropland on which erosion is controlled; or percent of pasture land managed to maintain vegetation for erosion control.

ODA has chosen to concentrate on land conditions rather than solely focusing on water quality monitoring because of the difficulty in separating agriculture's influence on water quality from other sources such as septic systems and climate variability, and because changes in land conditions such as streamside vegetation will take a long time to translate into water quality improvements. However, water quality monitoring activities in some areas will help evaluate the effects of changing land conditions on water quality parameters such as sediment and bacteria.

The priority or focus area concept is evolving based on conversations with LACs, SWCDs, landowners, and other stakeholders. ODA believes priority or focus areas will provide a tool to document the effectiveness of local Area Plans.

Is additional funding available for measuring effectiveness in priority or focus areas?

The funding that is currently available is the legislatively directed funding to SWCDs from OWEB that ODA helps administer through the Scopes of Work that are negotiated every year. ODA has not been provided additional funding for this work. However, other entities such as OWEB and DEQ (Clean Water Act 319 program) may have grant funding available for measuring and reporting progress.

What happens if land conditions don't improve in priority or focus areas?

ODA is working with our partners to develop strategies to address next steps where priority or focus areas are established and when conditions don't improve after a reasonable amount of time. These discussions are on-going.