

Agricultural environmental management

The new rules explained

Special to Country Life in BC

In keeping with the respect BC's agricultural operators have for the land, air and water, new rules for agricultural environmental management are now in place. They come after years of science and evidence-based analysis and, more importantly, conversations with agricultural operators throughout the province. The goal is to provide more clarity for the sector while better protecting the environment for all British Columbians. We'd like to thank the various associations, operators, and citizens who helped guide the Province toward a regulation that works better for everyone.

The old Agricultural Waste Control Regulation has been replaced with the new regulation called the Code of Practice for Agricultural Environmental Management. What does the new regulation mean for you? We've compiled some of our most frequently asked questions below.

Why a new regulation?

Through several consultations we heard the old rules were too vague for operators and weren't adequately protecting the environment. Working with the sector, we built a fair set of rules that ensure agricultural practices protect our drinking water, watercourses and air.

The regulation takes a different approach to the previous one. Requirements are more clearly outlined, and they're both risk-based and science-based. For example, more protective measures now need to be taken in high-risk areas and during high-risk conditions. Also, soil samples are required to be taken to help determine what measures are necessary on specific farms.



cutline

Who does this regulation apply to?

It applies to agricultural operations in BC, from small hobby farms to large commercial operations. That said, the regulation has been built with the understanding that not all agricultural operations are the same and that there are vast differences from one region of this province to another. Various requirements are contingent on an operation's location, size, and type of activity. Many farms won't need to make big changes to adjust to the new regulation.

What does this regulation include?

The new regulation includes provisions that aim to: ensure watercourses and groundwater are protected through proper storage and use of manure, other nutrient sources, and other materials; prevent water quality impacts

from contaminated run-off; prohibit direct discharges; require nutrient management planning in some cases; allow for increased monitoring in high-risk areas; provide clear compliance expectations for agricultural operators for setbacks, storage, and nutrient applications; and, require record-keeping.

What does this mean for me?

All operations will need to demonstrate a basic level of environmental protection, but many are already doing what the regulation requires. Requirements will affect farms differently depending on whether they are in a high-risk area, what their current practices are, and the nature and size of the farm. And, the regulation has some exceptions for small farms. For example, farms less than five hectares in size will not be required to have a nutrient management plan unless specifically requested

by the government based on environmental outcomes.

Some significant improvements to the infrastructure or management practices on larger operations might be needed. For example, farms with leaking manure storages will need to fix the problem and prevent leaks or farms that over-apply nutrients will need to ensure that appropriate application rates are used.

When is this happening?

The new rules came into effect on February 28, 2019, but many of the requirements, such as nutrient management plans, will be phased-in over the next decade. This approach will give agricultural operators time to plan for and adjust to the new rules, and for government to work collaboratively with industry to develop the necessary tools to support implementation.

Will there be support to adjust to the new rules?

New tools are being developed, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, to help operators make the transition. A nutrient management calculator will help determine nutrient needs for specific farms. Also in development are an application risk management tool, guidance materials that explain the regulation, as well as technical information and recommended best practices, such as how to take soil samples.

While there is not a specific new fund, agricultural operators continue to have access to several funds including the Environmental Farm Plan Program which helps with nutrient management planning.

How will it be enforced?

As we roll out the new regulation, we will be working with you to figure out what works and how to best help you comply with the new rules. Our goal is to support operators so that, working together, we can better protect the environment.

There are dedicated staff within the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy who will work with you to understand your obligations under the Environmental Management Act, which this regulation falls under. The team uses a consistent and risk-based approach for establishing compliance and enforcement priorities.

Got questions? We can help.

Email: AEMCoPenquiries@gov.bc.ca

Phone: 1 778-698-1973

Learn more:

<http://ow.ly/LWTY30nBHUQ>

SPONSORED BY THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

