BMPs for vegetables in Florida: The future is here!

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The “Water Quality/Quantity Best Management Practices for Florida Vegetable and Agronomic Crops” is the manual that describes the BMP program for vegetables in Florida. The manual, which is electronically accessible at <http://www.floridaagwaterpolicy.com>, was adopted by reference in Rule No 5M-8.004 F.A.C. titled “Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Florida Vegetable and Agronomic Crops” on February 8, 2006. Through the implementation of non-regulatory, incentive-based programs, the purpose of this rule is to reduce pollution affecting the water resources of the state. Based on the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, BMPs are defined as “practices or combinations of practices determined by the coordinating agencies, based on research, field-testing, and expert review, to be the most effective and practicable on-location means, including economical and technological considerations, for
improving water quality in agricultural and urban discharges”. The rule includes information about the approved BMP’s, presumption of compliance, notice of intent to implement, and record keeping. The statutory benefits for joining the program are (1) presumption of compliance with water quality standards (403.067 (7)(d) F.S.), (2) waiver of liability from the reimbursement of cost and damages associated with the evaluation, assessment, or remediation of nutrient contamination of ground water (376.307), and (3) eligibility for cost-share programs (570.085 (1)). The BMP program for vegetables applies to the whole state of Florida, except for the Tri-County Agricultural Area which comprises Flagler, Putnam and St. Johns Counties, (under rule 5M-2.005 F.A.C.) and the EAA (under rule 40E-63, F.A.C.) where pre-existing regulations were in place.

How to sign up for the program?

Participation in the program requires that applicable BMPs are implemented and documented as noted in the manual (Table 1). Defined parcels of lands may be enrolled in the vegetable BMP program by (1) completing a BMP checklist, (2) submitting a Notice of Intent to Implement (NOI), and (3) keeping these documents on file for possible later inspection. The BMP checklist (found on page A-1 of the BMP manual) is designed to assist vegetable growers in identifying appropriate BMPs for their specific site and growing conditions and should be used together with the decision tree flow chart (found on pages 7-8 of the BMP manual). Growers should check the boxes corresponding to the BMPs they are already implementing, and identify the year they plan to implement the other applicable BMPs not implemented yet. It should be noted that BMP 33 “Optimum fertilization management/application” has to be a part of all BMP plans.
How to Select BMPs that Apply to Specific Operations? Implementation Teams Provide One-on-one Help

BMP selection for a vegetable parcel is based on parcel location and type of production system. Regions of Florida with specific BMP requirements are (1) areas where a BMAP/TMDL has been established, (2) North Florid region, (3) springs recharge basins, (4) EAA or the C139 basin, and (5) south Miami-Dade county. Recognized production systems are bare ground vs. plastic culture, drip or seepage irrigation, and permanent or temporary farming operations.

Growers who need one-on-one help in completing their BMP checklist and notice of intent may contact with their UF-IFAS County Extension Agent or nearest implementation team (Fig. 1). In addition, implementation team members may conduct on-farm demonstrations of selected BMPs, help with employee training, farm evaluations, BMP recommendations, and assist in locating cost-share funds to partially off-set the cost of BMP implementation.

UF/IFAS Vegetable BMP Website

The “Best Management Practices for the Florida Vegetable Industry” web site (http://www.imok.ufl.edu/bmp/vegetable/) was developed as a quick resource for growers, Extension educators, implementation team members and all who are involved in the BMP process. Currently, the site is organized into four sections:

1. The BMP manual accessible on-line.

2. Background documents on how to participate in the BMP program. Among others, this section contains the BMP checklist for self evaluation of current BMP adoption.

3. A list of selected UF/IFAS on-line Extension publications applicable to the state-wide BMP program and interim measures.
4. Additional BMP-related resources. This section contains a link to a series of frequently asked question regarding BMPs, and how to locate and contact the implementation team.
Fig. 1. Implementation team members and their areas of operation.

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BMP Implementation Teams are available in several areas of Florida to assist Agricultural Producers with BMP implementation activities such as:

+ Farm Evaluations
+ BMP Recommendations
+ BMP NOIs and Checklists
+ Cost Share Funding
+ Demonstrations
+ Employee Training

Contact the Implementation Team member in your area or your local UF/IFAS County Extension Office for assistance.