Louisiana developing BMPs for its crops

As agriculture continues to face pressure from environmental protection forces, Louisiana is developing its own rules for bringing actual farming practices in line with environmental goals.

This year may see the adoption of a full set of recommended ways of soil, pesticides and fertilizers to the state's rivers, bayous and lakes. Adoption would not mean an immediate end of muddied or chemically polluted water from farming. Even if farmers adopted the recommended practices completely, it will take years to see measurable changes in the quality of some streams, an environmental official said.

Committees of farmers and representatives of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, a federal agency launched more than 50 years ago to stop soil erosion, are working on what is called "best management practices," or BMPs. They have formulated a field to prevent as much runoff as possible when it rains.

The BMPs come from the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, a federal agency launched more than 50 years ago to stop soil erosion, and the American Farm Bureau Federation, an association of farmers and representatives of the federal government. The BMP committees modify SCS recommendations to fit Louisiana conditions.

What is notable about these BMPs is that they are not, as many environmental regulations, something that will be done in a hurry. It will take years to see if they work. The BMPs are simply ways to plow, fertilize, apply pesticides and work a field to prevent as much runoff as possible when it rains.

"We have reduced our use of fertilizers and pesticides considerably, not from the mandatory standpoint, but from an economic standpoint.

"If they don't like the procedures, they are not going to follow them. My guess is that it is going to be a cooperative thing.

"We feel like it is time to stand up and tell the public how good agriculture is, and that we are providing safe and wholesome food.

"We need some more time to make it sure it is going to work," she said.

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