



## 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### How is the Lake Erie algal bloom the fault of the fertilizer business and the farmers? Why are we being singled out?

Former Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) Director, Scott Nally, said it best when he compared the algal bloom issue in the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB) to “..... a three-legged stool”. Agriculture, according to him, was but one leg. Pollutants are coming from other sources, namely human waste and various industrial sources. And while it is easy to try to place all of the blame on the farmers and the agriculture industry as a whole, the science just does not bear that out. At the same time, programs and efforts have been made to remove phosphorous from detergents and lawn fertilizers, and there are regulations governing what can come out of waste water treatment facilities. Agriculture needs to do its part through voluntary efforts.

#### How much of the phosphate going into the lake comes from agriculture?

We don't know, but we are trying to find out through watershed monitoring. We do know that Dissolved Reactive Phosphate (DRP) comes from different sources, meaning “P is P” insofar as detected levels are concerned. What we DO know is that agriculture is a contributor, and we do not have time to wait for all of the scientific discovery to occur, and then act. According to scientists who have studied the problem in great detail, agriculture and other non-point sources have contributed over half of the phosphorus over the last decade (See P Task Force II Report: [http://lakeerie.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Reports/Task\\_Force\\_Report\\_October\\_2013.pdf](http://lakeerie.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Reports/Task_Force_Report_October_2013.pdf)). The time to act is now. The problem is out there today. We intend to do our part on our portion of the whole issue.

#### Won't Senate Bill 150 take care of this? Is this just one more piece of duplicate legislation?

SB-150 is an effort to educate and certify the farmers and their employees in the proper application of fertilizer products to their crops and fields. While it does follow the principles of 4R Nutrient Stewardship, it is targeted specifically to the grower. The program is focused upon the Nutrient Service Providers (NSPs), who also need to be certified and responsible for making the proper cropping recommendations to their grower customers. The two programs will actually complement each other.

#### Why not just wait for EPA rules and regulations?

Our industry does not believe we can legislate environmental responsibility. Consider laws now on the books against all sorts of crimes against man and the environment, then ask yourself why we still have crime, illegal drug use, and so on. Just as we cannot legislate morality, we cannot legislate true, meaningful, lasting environmental responsibility. Industry believes that if it is able to develop the programs they are more likely to be successful. The agricultural industry has the knowledge, on-the-ground experience, and the innovative spirit to make a bigger difference than would mandates.

#### How do we know you really care about this issue?

Because we depend upon the best environmentalists in the world for our livelihood, the American Farmer. When you realize that their land is their birthright and farming is their profession and their passion, you'll also come to realize that it makes no sense for them to do anything that would harm that birthright and ultimately bring an end to their way of life. Farmers want to do the right thing; we want to do all that we can to make that the easiest decision they ever have to make. We know how to supply the **Right Product**, applied at the **Right Time**, at the **Right Rate**, and in the **Right Place** to insure maximum economic yields with minimum environmental impact. That's what this is all about.

#### Why should nutrient service providers follow 4R Nutrient Stewardship and go through the certification process?

It is the right thing to do. Second, companies that offer advice and expertise to keep the fertilizer in the crops and out of the water, will gain customer loyalty and market share, and may also be able to charge some for the quality of their advice. Finally, if this voluntary effort starts to show strong results, it will reduce or even eliminate the push toward regulating the industry.

### **Why not just pass a law making phosphorous applications illegal? Didn't we do that with lawn fertilizer? Why is this different?**

Yes, in some states there are large areas where phosphate applications to lawns are not allowed because of potential runoff. The difference is that crops such as corn, soybeans and wheat require phosphorous in order to complete their life cycles and produce the protein and fiber we need from them, whereas lawn grasses require only very small quantities that are generally available already in the soil. Bear in mind that phosphorous is a naturally-occurring, organic element. Fertilizer companies manufacture agricultural phosphates by digging mineral deposits in various parts of the world that are high in bone phosphate, laid down there over the millennium through the skeletal remains of animals. In fact, phosphate ore's purity is determined by a scale called Bone Phosphorous Level, or BPL. To deny crops this vital element through restrictive legislation could drastically reduce yields by up to 70% and ultimately result in food shortages and skyrocketing food costs.

### **Why should a farmer work with a certified nutrient service provider?**

Good nutrient stewardship will increase farm profitability while improving water quality. Certification provides customers another way to know that a company is a trusted advisor. If they follow the company's advice, they can be confident that they will do the best thing for their farm, and for the environment. The principles outlined in this certification process will benefit the producer the most. Implementing these practices will retain nutrients on your crop fields while producing agricultural products instead of algae.

### **Why do you think this 4R Nutrient Stewardship certification program will be successful?**

Almost forty years ago we had a serious problem with sediment and attached phosphorus running into Lake Erie. We asked the farmers in the region to change their farming practices and embrace various forms of conservation tillage on their land. The voluntary response was outstanding and the problem was drastically reduced. Not only the farmers, but also those who provide services to or for them, want to be part of the solution to this problem, not part of the problem itself.

### **How soon will we see results?**

While opinions vary somewhat, most of the experts say it will take many years, perhaps decades, before we will begin to see significant reductions in Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) in the WLEB. This is because phosphorous moves very, very slowly in the whole WLEB drainage system. What we DO expect to see pretty quickly is an improvement in the phosphorous numbers gathered from edge-of-field monitoring. This will tell us that we are on the right track.

### **Wouldn't organic farming solve the lake's problem?**

No matter what farming practices you follow, nutrient management is important. The 4R Nutrient Stewardship certification process provides the opportunity for the farmer to consider all forms of nutrients (manure, compost, biosolids, commercial fertilizer) being used in the right amounts, with the right placement at the right time. No matter what cropping practice you use, the application nutrients will be needed to produce the desired crop. Farmers need to make sure that the applied nutrients stay where they can have a positive impact on their crops and not leave the fields to grow algae.

### **How long before the WLEB algae problem goes away?**

We cannot say. What we do know is that phosphorous has been entering the watershed from failed septic systems, overflowed and malfunctioning municipal sewage treatment plants, animal waste and fertilizer runoff for many, many years, and we know that phosphorous moves slowly through the system. We hope research currently underway can give us some sort of timeline to follow as all sources of phosphorous loadings are identified and corrective action is undertaken. It will take time, and it should be pointed out that this is true, whether we're talking voluntary or mandatory compliance.

For more information, please visit [www.4Rcertified.org](http://www.4Rcertified.org), email [info@oaba.net](mailto:info@oaba.net) or call 614-326-7520.

*The 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program is governed and guided by the Nutrient Stewardship Committee, a diverse set of stakeholders from business, government, university and non-governmental sectors with a common goal of maintaining agricultural productivity while also improving the quality of Lake Erie and its contributing watersheds. The program is administered by the Ohio AgriBusiness Association.*