

# MMPA Producer “EQIPs” Family Farm for Environmental Compliance

By Brian Buehler  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

A complaint about one of his cows being loose in a drainage ditch led MMPA member Leonard “Butch” Brown to a greater awareness of environmental stewardship.

Butch and his brother Bill operate a 100-cow dairy and farm about 750 acres in Sanilac County. Located on a major highway just west of Sandusky, they have a highly visible operation.

“Being right on M-46 everybody drives by our place,” says Butch.

Butch had worked with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to incorporate conservation measures like no-till planting in the past, but he had not utilized conservation programs for the dairy operation. Following the complaint, he worked with the Sanilac Conservation District to install fencing and a filter strip to protect the drain.

A few years later, Butch went to the local NRCS field office for assistance with managing waste on the dairy operation.

“When a producer comes to NRCS for assistance the first thing we do is develop a conservation plan,” says Dave Newkirk, district conservationist for Sanilac County. “You’ve got to walk the farm, you can’t do it at the counter.”

The conservation plan describes what the environmental issues on a particular farm are. Once the issues are determined, the best program to address those issues, whether through NRCS or another agency, is identified. On the Brown farm, storing and utiliz-

ing animal waste was the major concern, according to Dave.

In 2002, Butch applied for an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract for financial assistance for an animal waste storage facility and a comprehensive nutrient management plan. A CNMP is required for all waste storage facilities funded through EQIP.

The farm’s EQIP application was not selected for funding in 2002 but was selected for funding the following year. He hired a USDA-approved Technical Service Provider to develop his CNMP, which was completed in 2004. By September of that year, he also had a used slurry store installed on his farm.

The farm paid the costs upfront for both practices and was

reimbursed for a portion of the cost through the EQIP contract. EQIP pays up to 75 percent of the cost of installing approved conservation practices.

Butch says he manages nutrients much differently after going through the process of developing a conservation plan and a CNMP.

“It makes you more aware of the environment, makes you a better steward of the land,” Butch remarks.

Before developing the farm’s CNMP and installing the slurry store, Butch spread manure from his dairy operation onto the same fields everyday. He now spreads manure only twice a year, over more fields. Utilizing soil testing, manure analysis and GPS, he applies the manure at different rates using science-based methods.

## The Road to an EQIP Contract

- Contact your local NRCS field office.
- NRCS and producer conduct a farm assessment and develop a conservation plan.
- If conservation plan describes an environmental concern that can be addressed by EQIP, producer can apply for a contract. Applications are accepted on a continual basis.
- If producer requests financial assistance for an animal waste treatment or storage facility, a comprehensive nutrient management plan is required.
- NRCS ranks application according to environmental impact of producer’s conservation plan.
- Applications are selected for funding on a monthly basis as funding permits.

The farm receives EQIP funds for properly utilizing the manure from the dairy that requires Butch to keep detailed manure application records.

"It makes you more conscious of what you're doing," says Butch about participating in EQIP.

The conservation measures and record-keeping Butch implemented through EQIP made it an easy process to have the farm operation verified through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program in both Crop and Livestock systems.

With the improvements to the farm's facilities and practices through EQIP, along with MAEAP verification, Butch says he is now a lot less concerned about all the traffic that goes by his farm.



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## Next Steps Planned in National Animal ID System

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns recently announced the release of an updated Strategies for Implementation of NAIS plan that outlines timelines and benchmarks for the establishment of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS).

The implementation plan hopes to ensure full implementation of a national animal ID system by 2009. It establishes benchmarks for accomplishing the remaining implementation goals to enable the NAIS to be operational by 2007, and to achieve full producer participation by 2009. These include:

#### USDA Operational Milestones:

- **August 2005:** Achieved Operational Premises Registration Systems
- **March 2006:** AIN Management System Operational
- **June 2006:** Cooperative Agreements with Private/State Animal Tracking Databases

- **February 2007:** Private and State Animal Tracking Databases and Animal Trace Monitoring System Operational

#### USDA Benchmarks for Progress:

- **January 2007:** 25 percent of premises registered
- **January 2008:** 70 percent of premises registered; 40 percent of "new" animals identified
- **January 2009:** 100 percent of premises registered; 100 percent of "new" animals identified; 60 percent of animal <1 year of age have complete movement data

USDA also released the general technical standards for Integration of Private and State Animal Tracking Databases with the NAIS. Private database owners are invited to submit applications for system evaluation to USDA and offer feedback as the final technical requirements are established. USDA will then enter into cooperative agreements with

owners of databases that meet the standards.

IDairy, a consortium of six leading dairy industry organizations, is leading the effort to implement NAIS within the dairy industry. The technology now exists to cost-effectively register the premises of dairy farms, and the animals on those farms. IDairy exists simply to provide information to farmers about how to register their premises with the appropriate state authorities, and how to obtain tags for individual cattle. IDairy also supports a national animal identification system that protects farmers' privacy, while also allowing for immediate access of relevant information by government authorities in the event of an animal disease crisis. IDairy is examining Animal Tracking Database options that will best serve the needs of the dairy industry.