



## Quality Watch

By Gary Trimner

Director of Member Services/Quality Control

### Livestock\*A\*Syst Approved for Verification

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Administrative Committee adopted the use of the Livestock \*A\* Syst (LAS) as a method to verify farms in the MAEAP Livestock Systems at its March 4, 2010 meeting. The adoption of the LAS as a verification method for livestock farms will not change the requirements needed for MAEAP verification with one exception: A farmer does not need a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) to achieve verification with LAS. The adoption of the LAS tool will now allow farms to become verified on livestock systems without a CNMP. Farmers may continue to become verified using a CNMP as well as LAS. Some farmers have been waiting to become MAEAP verified to avoid paying the cost of obtaining a CNMP. Michigan Department of Agriculture MAEAP verifiers have already been using the LAS to reverify farms for about a year.

Livestock \*A\* Syst was developed by MAEAP partners to provide producers with information contained in one publication concerning environmental rules, comprehensive nutrient management plan requirements, Right to Farm Guidelines and the requirements needed to become MAEAP verified in Livestock Systems. The MAEAP Livestock \*A\* Syst is designed to meet the needs of those producers who choose to use a risk management-based assessment to work toward MAEAP livestock systems verification.

In addition, the Administrative Committee also adopted a LAS scoring system to allow farms to receive a relative score based on the environmental risks. With the adoption of LAS scoring system, our member representatives will be able to sit down with members to go through the risk questions on the farm to determine the level of environmental risks. The LAS scoring system was developed to be able to measure the level of environmental risks on farms. The scoring system works much like the Grade A survey system. Each item required for the Livestock System verification has been assigned a relative score based on environmental risks. Farms that are in compliance with the item or if the item does not apply to the farm will receive credit for that item. Items not in compliance are subtracted from the total points and divided by the total points to achieve a percent value. If a farmer establishes a score this year and makes changes to his farming operation over the course of the year the farm can be rescored to measure the farm's progress. This point system can be used to track progress and plan improvements as new management practices are adopted. The higher the score, the closer the farm is to MAEAP livestock verification. The farm score must be 100 percent to become MAEAP verified.

We have assigned a goal to our member representatives to score 10 percent of their farms in 2010. We believe that MMPA farms will score high. It is important to note that all

scores and information is strictly confidential and will not be shared. Although the LAS tool contains references specific to Michigan regulations, those regulations are not significantly different from other states. As a result, we plan to score MMPA member farms in other states as well as Michigan. LAS is an excellent educational tool.

We are being asked by many of our finished product customers for information concerning what MMPA and its member farms are doing to protect the environment and promote sustainability. We have provided copies of the LAS to those customers to help explain some of what MMPA farms are doing.

Many MMPA members have received and reviewed the LAS with their member representatives since it was first published.

If you have not already received a LAS booklet or if you would like your farm scored, please contact your MMPA Member Representative. Training will be provided to the member representatives on the LAS scoring system sometime this spring or early summer.

By being proactive and participating in MAEAP, MMPA members are strengthening their long time commitment to being good stewards of the land and protecting the environment.