

Watershed Ag Journal



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Navigate Success with Sensible Farm Planning

Have you been managing and operating your farm from a mental picture – hoping you’ve covered all the essential bases while new regulations, paper work and needed farm improvements pile up to headache proportions?



Would a comprehensive ‘business plan’ for your farm help to ease your frame of mind and keep priority projects on track?

Meet Larry Gill, Watershed Technical Specialist employed by the Coos Soil and Water Conservation District. Larry’s job is to assist landowners in Coos County with developing farm plans. Larry has an extensive background in forestry and years of experience on dairy and cattle ranches. He has been working for the Coos District since September, and is available, free of charge, for landowners seeking technical advise, farm planning and financial incentive programs. One of Larry’s current projects is developing a farm plan for Alan Hermann on the South Fork of the Coquille near Broadbent.

What is a farm plan?

A farm plan is a voluntary, non-regulatory, document that describes all the resource concerns on

your property (i.e., invasive weeds, soil erosion, irrigation needs etc.), lists the management goals of the landowner, and lays out an appropriate time line for suggested projects and practices that best address those concerns and goals.

In the process of developing a farm plan, Larry performs an assessment and evaluation of the land and natural resources present. Larry finds that many landowners are interested in seeing how their own evaluation of the land matches up to his. “They want to know what’s out there,” says Larry. This

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evaluation, developed purely for the landowner’s information, prioritizes the

resource concerns on the farm. Larry consults with the landowner about their concerns and goals for the farm, and from this a long-term plan is developed with the landowner to address problem areas and improvements on the farm. Farm plans generally cover a scope of ten years, but may be developed or implemented for however long or short the landowner desires.

“The landowner sets the pace,” says Larry, “development and implementation of a farm plan is a completely voluntary process.” Farm plans are certified by the Coos Soil and Water Conservation District Directors, and no one has access to these files or property without the landowner’s permission. Larry admits that some landowners are discouraged by the ‘files release’ form they are asked to sign at the beginning of the process. But, he explains, what the form means is that anyone, such another agency, who wants to access the landowner’s file or property must first inquire with the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Soil and Water Conservation District,

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Farm Planning continued... those agencies will then contact the landowner for permission. At any point in the process the landowner can deny access or choose to not follow through with any portion the plan - there is no penalty or regulation whatsoever involved with the farm plan. Alan got the ball rolling for his own farm plan once he saw that several of his neighbors, also involved with farm planning and conservation programs, were finding the process beneficial and unintrusive.

Though farm plans may act as a buffer between the landowner and regulatory agencies, Larry also sees them as a site specific, voluntary prescription for healing the land and enhancing salmon habitat.

Why should you have a farm plan?

Farm plans are good sense business for the landowner, the livestock and the land. Farm production, especially with small family operations, is forever dependent on land and natural resource conditions. Farm plans help farmers and land managers to gauge their management options against the resource conditions on the farm, and make choices based on what works best for the land as well as their own goals. For example, the Hermann cows, which are managed for production of feeder steers, have grazed nearly all their forage in some higher pastures leaving almost bare ground and tough weeds. The Hermann farm plan may suggest a program of intensive strip grazing management. Ideally, the strip grazing will allow regeneration of forage vegetation that will provide several benefits: help out-compete weed species, provide ground cover that reduces soil erosion, increases infiltration of precipitation and filtering of sediments. Not to mention the cows have better forage all season long. Other parts of the Hermann farm plan will include burying a main line for irrigation, installing pasture drain tiles, weed/pest management, forest stand improvement, and erosion control.

Larry also points out the benefits of a farm plan in regards to unpredictable market fluctuations. If a farmer has to change focus in mid season because the price has dropped out of one product, they can turn to the farm plan to easily see what steps to take for improving another resource on the farm.

Conservation programs

Implementation of a certified farm plan for your operation puts you in better standing for many conservation incentive programs. Some USDA conservation programs, such as EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program), require operators to have

a farm plan in place. If approved, EQIP will pay 75% cost-share on many, if not all, of the conservation practices such as improved irrigation systems, fencing for grazing management, and livestock watering systems. Under EQIP a landowner is eligible for up to \$450,000 in cost-share for the life of the contract. The remaining cost can

come from any non-federal source including grants, donations or the landowner's labor, for example.

The Hermann Ranch, which primarily produces feeder steers, is in need of several improvements. Allen would like to install a covered feeding area, a buried main line, cross fencing, gutters and down spouts, and gravel the heavy use areas around gates, to name a few. All of these practices make good sense from the land manager's perspective as well as protecting the quality of our natural resources. Development of a farm plan will help Allen rank these projects by priority and allow him to apply for EQIP funds to help pay for the expense.

Keep perspective on regulations

No part of a farm plan is required or regulated. However, to the benefit of the landowner, a farm plan takes into account any regulation of wildlife and natural resources that may potentially effect the operation. Farm plans are developed or revised to be in compliance with applicable laws, such as the Endangered Species Act and the Coos and Coquille Agricultural Water Quality Management Plan. It is the landowner's responsibility to ensure compliance with the law, however, implementation of a farm plan may be used as a navigational tool by the landowner to stay on track with regulation. A working farm plan would also help the landowner in the case of a water quality complaint investigation by providing documentation of efforts to avoid or correct a problem.

Though farm plans may act as a buffer between the landowner and regulatory agencies, Larry also sees them as a site specific, voluntary prescription for healing the land and enhancing salmon habitat. Larry is currently building a list of farm plan applicants, and is very willing to work around the landowner's schedule. If you are interested in having a farm plan developed for your operation or would like more information contact **Larry Gill, Watershed Technical Specialist, at the Coos SWCD (541) 396-2841 x30.**

Landowners Can Get Money for Projects Big and Small

Get paid for improvements on your farm and forest?? Is it true??

Yes, it is true, and there are lots of options to choose from. Listed below are just a few of the popular cost-share programs now available to farmers, ranchers, hobby farmers, and small wood lot owners. There is free technical assistance available to help with project planning and program applications.

EQIP: Environmental Quality Incentives Program *Contact Tom Purvis, NRCS, 396-2841x33*

This program works best for those who have a farm plan and want to get going on all those improvements and maintenance projects outlined in the plan.

- ◆ Offers landowners 75% of the cost of a wide range of conservation practices such as fencing, weed control, livestock watering facilities, irrigation improvements, manure management, tree thinning and planting, labor to do the projects and much much more. Come into the office to see just what practices and rates the USDA could provide for you.
- ◆ The remaining 25% cost can be provided by any non-federal source including labor donated by the landowner.
- ◆ In addition, incentive payments can be made for up to three years to encourage the use of new conservation strategies such as integrated pest practices, wildlife habitat management and other types of soil and water conservation.
- ◆ Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pasture or forest that has been historically grazed or farmed.
- ◆ A landowner or entity can request up to \$450,000 in cost-share and incentive payments.
- ◆ Requires a certified farm plan, (no charge) from SWCD or NRCS.
- ◆ EQIP contracts are one to ten years in length.

CREP: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program *Contact Bret Harris, FSA, 396-4323*

This program pays you for establishing a functioning streambank or riparian zone. Great for bank stabilization, and filtering runoff. In 2005, the Agricultural Water Quality Management Rules will require functioning, vegetated riparian areas.

- ◆ Pays annual rental payment to landowners to remove cropland or marginal pastureland from agricultural production along streams or wetlands and then plant to native trees, shrubs, and grass.
- ◆ Annual rental rates per acre (includes annual incentive payment):
 - Non-irrigated land rate is based on soil types.
 - Marginal pastureland, with seasonal stream \$81, with permanent stream \$90.
 - Irrigated land (if landowner agrees to lease water rights to State for instream use) \$112.50 to \$135.
- ◆ CREP also pays \$7 to \$10 per acre per year for maintenance.
- ◆ Pays 75% of cost of installing conservation practices including fencing, trees and tree planting. Also pays three types of one-time incentive payments including 40% of costs. (Therefore the overall cost-share returned to the landowner is 115%.)
- ◆ CREP contracts are 10 or 15 years in length with no further commitment.
- ◆ Amount of acreage enrolled is based on site-specific soil types with a minimum buffer width of 35 horizontal feet.

Get Money continued....

Small Grant Program

Contact Larry Gill, SWCD, 396-2841x30

This program is good option for those who know what they want to do and are ready to get started right away. It is a very simple process.

- ◆ Pays 75% of the cost of watershed enhancement projects totalling up to \$10,000 per landowner.
- ◆ Eligible projects include a range of practices in forest restoration and enhancement, agriculture and range restoration and enhancement, and urban and rural residential restoration and enhancement.
- ◆ Applications are reviewed by a local committee on a monthly basis. Approved projects receive funding within a month after approval.
- ◆ Landowner may receive cost-share for materials up front before project is completed.
- ◆ Simple process with no long-term commitment.
- ◆ Technical assistance available for planning and grant application.
- ◆ Does not require a farm plan.



New CAFO Rules Presented

The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) is conducting informational meetings across the state to present the new Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) draft rules. A CAFO refers to any farm or operation that holds animals on a prepared, non-vegetated surface for 45 days or more per year, has a wastewater treatment works, or discharges wastes to surface waters.

In 2001, the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2156 directing ODA to regulate all livestock operations to satisfy both state water quality laws and the federal Clean Water Act. ODA is now revising the current CAFO permit to meet the requirements of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The new CAFO NPDES General Permit will be available in 2003 from ODA. Some of the main changes to the rules will require more operators to have waste management plans, and some Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs) not currently under permit will now need a CAFO permit.

An operator may request an educational review of their operation by a local inspector. The educational review allows the inspector to point out potential water quality issues and to suggest best waste management practices.

The public comment period on the new rules is open through November 15, 2002, at 5:00 pm. Comments can be mailed to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Division, 635 Capitol St. NE, Salem, Oregon 97301-2532.

Check out Coos SWCD's website
www.coosswcd.oacd.org
to learn more about the Coos & Coquille Area Agricultural Water Quality Management Plan.
Look at a map of the Plan boundaries, download fact sheets, and much more!

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