



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Hardin County Extension News Release

For Further Information Contact:

Mark Badertscher

Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator

Phone – 419-674-2297

E-Mail – badertscher.4@osu.edu

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Fertilizer Recertification

Hardin County – Northwestern Ohio is now seeing full implementation of Ohio's Agricultural Fertilizer Applicator Certification regulation. The regulation was result of Senate Bill 150, which was co-sponsored by former State Senator Cliff Hite (<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/905.322> and <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/905.321>). The 2014 regulation required farmers to complete a fertilizer certification program if they applied fertilizer to more than 50 acres of land in agricultural production primarily for sale. Exemptions included fertilizer applied through a planter, individuals whose crops remained on the farm for their livestock and not sold, or fertilizer applied by a commercial applicator.

Manure was not part of the regulation since it was specifically addressed by other regulations. However, the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) later clarified that if a farmer purchased composted manure, such as poultry, and then applied it themselves; it would be considered a fertilizer and they would have to complete the certification program.

Farmers were given three years to complete the certification training. Training included a two-hour program if they already had a Private Pesticide Applicator License, otherwise, they had to complete a three-hour program. Key components of the training were to know the potential causes for algal blooms in Lake Erie and management practices to reduce phosphorus losses from farm fields. Training was provided primarily by County Extension Agriculture & Natural Resources Educators of the Ohio State University.

In three years, 17,493 Ohioans completed the Fertilizer Certification program. Of this total, 63 fertilizer applicators from Hardin County will require recertification by March 31, 2018. The three-year window to complete the initial certification program ended September 30, 2017. Any farmer applying fertilizer that has more than 50 acres of cropland without an Agricultural Fertilizer Applicator certificate after September can be fined and/or charged with a misdemeanor offense. Farmers that still need certification have two options: complete a three-hour training program or pass a state test. At this time, Hardin County will not be offering a three-hour program in 2018, but programs will be offered this spring in a few nearby counties.

The ODA has also made other changes to the Fertilizer Certification program starting October 1:

- Those renewing their fertilizer certificate, which must be done every three years, must either pass a fertilizer exam or take a one-hour class. Hardin County Extension will be offering recertification classes in Mt. Victory on March 13 and in Kenton on March 30.
- Two new items were added to the required records that certified fertilizer applicators must keep: Now they must record the number of acres where they applied fertilizer and the total amount of fertilizer applied.
- Only one person at a farm or business needs to be certified to apply fertilizer. A family member or employee of the certificate holder can apply fertilizer under their direct supervision, meaning the certificate holder has instructed that person where, when and how to apply fertilizer, and is no farther than 25 miles away or within two hours travel of the applicator working under their direct supervision. The rule change clarified that provision.
- Certificate holders who do not also hold a license to apply pesticides will see their fertilizer certificate period change to April 1 to March 31. Previously, it was June 1 to May 31. The new cycle is aimed at ensuring that certifications will generally be in place prior to the planting season.
- A grace period of 180 days is offered to certificate holders who do not send in their application and payment prior to the date their certificate expires. However, in renewing their certificate, the applicant has to have completed the required training or test before March 31.

The Fertilizer Certification program was a result of a broader initiative developed by a 2012 state task force consisting of several Ohio agencies involved with agricultural, environmental, and natural resources issues. The task force developed recommendations to improve Ohio's waterways while maintaining the integrity of the agricultural industry. The Fertilizer Certification program is one way that the agricultural community is assuring the public that farmers know the best management practices when applying fertilizer. More information on the Agriculture Fertilizer Applicator Certification program may be found at <https://nutrienteducation.osu.edu/>

Article written by Ed Lentz, OSU Extension-Hancock County and edited by Mark Badertscher, OSU Extension-Hardin County.