

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT (EXCERPT)
Act 451 of 1994

324.8710 Michigan agriculture environmental assurance program.

Sec. 8710.

(1) The director, in consultation with the council, shall implement a Michigan agriculture environmental assurance program designed to promote natural resources conservation through education, technical assistance, and verification. The MAEAP shall be a voluntary program that is available to farms throughout the state.

(2) A farmer who desires to have his or her farm MAEAP-verified shall do all of the following:

(a) Complete educational requirements authorized by the department.

(b) Develop and implement 1 or more conservation plans as approved by the director.

(c) Upon completion of subdivisions (a) and (b), contact the department to arrange for an on-site evaluation.

(3) If the department conducts an on-site evaluation and determines that a farm is meeting MAEAP standards, the department shall issue a MAEAP verification. A MAEAP verification that is in effect on September 30, 2015 is valid for 5 years from the original issue date. Beginning October 1, 2015, a new MAEAP verification or reverification is valid for 5 years.

(4) A farm is eligible for reverification if the department determines it is meeting MAEAP standards through an on-site evaluation conducted by the department or its designee.

(5) The department shall provide MAEAP verification signs to each MAEAP-verified farm.

(6) A farm that allows its verification to lapse or whose verification is revoked under subsection (7) shall forfeit its verification sign and all other benefits that are provided to MAEAP-verified farms under this act.

(7) The director may revoke verification of a MAEAP-verified farm if any of the following apply:

(a) The department, in consultation with the department of environmental quality, determines with scientific evidence provided by water quality data that the MAEAP-verified farm caused an exceedance of water quality standards as a result of nonconformance with MAEAP standards.

(b) The MAEAP-verified farm fails to conform to MAEAP standards as a result of gross negligence.

(c) The MAEAP-verified farm fails to comply with protocols for verification as approved by the commission of agriculture and rural development.

(d) Upon advice from the interagency technical review panel provided for in subsection (11), the director determines that the MAEAP-verified farm is responsible for a pattern of repeated violations of environmental laws, rules, regulations, permit conditions, settlement agreements, orders of consent, or judicial orders that were due to separate and distinct events.

(8) A farmer is not liable for groundwater contamination on a MAEAP-verified farm for activities on the MAEAP-verified farm unless he or she was grossly negligent or in violation of state or federal law or failed to comply with the MAEAP standards. This part does not modify or limit any obligation, responsibility, or liability imposed by any other provision of state law.

(9) The department shall establish a MAEAP grants program. Grants issued under the MAEAP grants program are limited to availability of funds collected pursuant to this part. Grants shall be available for all of the following:

(a) Technical assistance.

(b) Promotion of the MAEAP.

(c) Educational programs related to the MAEAP.

(d) Demonstration projects to implement conservation practices.

(e) Removal of potential sources of contamination.

(f) Other purposes considered appropriate by the director.

(10) Following review of the proposed tiered recognition program submitted to the director by the council under section 8708, the director shall approve and implement a tiered recognition program. As part of the tiered recognition program, the department shall provide a certificate of progress to a farm participating in MAEAP recognizing each time a new tier is achieved. The certificate of progress shall summarize conservation practices implemented by the farm and the environmental impacts of the implemented conservation practices. The certificate of progress shall recognize the farm for its achievement and encourage the farm to complete the remaining conservation practices necessary for verification. A certificate of progress is valid for 5 years from the date of mailing. Upon written confirmation by the farmer and the MAEAP technician updating any new conservation practices and confirming that all previous applicable conservation practices are still being implemented, the department shall reissue a certificate of progress for additional 5-year periods, as appropriate, until the farm becomes MAEAP-verified in the applicable system or the farmer ceases implementation of the conservation practices. Information collected under this section is not subject to the freedom of information act, 1976 PA 442, MCL 15.231 to 15.246.

(11) The department and the department of environmental quality shall enter into a memorandum of

understanding to formalize a commitment to promote the MAEAP and to clarify the application of state and federal environmental laws to farms. In addition, the memorandum of understanding shall provide for all of the following:

(a) An ongoing interagency technical review panel for MAEAP-verified farms that discharge in violation of state or federal law to determine enforcement action.

(b) Preference for funding for nonpoint source pollution – funds for farms seeking MAEAP verification.

(c) Considerations for reverification of a farm with revoked MAEAP verification status.

(d) Integration of the MAEAP into pollution prevention activities of both agencies.

(e) Clarification of the consultation process in part 88 to ensure that the department of agriculture and rural development has meaningful input into the establishment of the grants program and the issuance of grants.

(12) Beginning December 1, 2016 and every December 1 thereafter, the department shall publish a report on MAEAP that includes, but is not limited to, all of the following:

(a) County and statewide totals for the previous fiscal year of all of the following:

(i) Conservation practices implemented.

(ii) Environmental impacts of practices implemented.

(iii) Number of new verifications and reverifications.

(iv) Number of unique farms verified.

(v) Number of farms in tiered recognition system.

(vi) Total area and percentage of this state's farmland involved.

(b) County and statewide program to-date totals of all of the following:

(i) Conservation practices implemented.

(ii) Environmental impacts of practices implemented.

(iii) Number of new verifications and reverifications.

(iv) Number of unique farms verified.

(v) Number of farms in tiered recognition system.

(vi) Total area and percentage of this state's farmland involved.

(c) A summary of educational and MAEAP verification standards changes for each system tool and an overview of the reasons for the changes.

(d) A summary of each system subcommittee's work beyond the standards changes, including identification of ongoing and emerging issues.

(13) The department shall make available a consent form for completion by farmers implementing conservation practices that includes both of the following:

(a) Permission for the department to associate the farmer's name, farm location, and mailing address with conservation practices implemented on that farm.

(b) A statement by the farmer that conservation practices being implemented on the farm are for the purpose of working toward MAEAP verification.

(14) The department shall provide for the consent forms described in subsection (13) to be authenticated. The department may use a completed consent form in the recognition program described in subsection (10). Information collected under this subsection is not subject to the freedom of information act, 1976 PA 442, MCL 15.231 to 15.246.

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