

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION		NUMBER: 9500-008
SUBJECT: USDA POLICY FOR GROUND WATER QUALITY	DATE: August 4, 2011	
	OPI: Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment	

1. PURPOSE

This statement documents and sets forth the policy of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to protect and enhance ground water quality.

2. BACKGROUND

Ground water quality is important to all Americans, and it is the intent of the Department of Agriculture to ensure that its programs and activities reflect that importance. The quality of ground water may be affected by contamination from many sources, including some occurring naturally and some induced by agricultural and silvicultural practices. The Nation's farmers, ranchers, and foresters need to prudently use nutrients and chemicals as they help produce the food and fiber necessary for improving the quality of life of all mankind, and to meet the needs of a growing population.

This ground water policy statement is issued to improve the management, coordination, and effectiveness of USDA assistance to farmers, ranchers, foresters, State and local government agencies, and other water users in rural areas.

3. USDA GENERAL POLICY FOR GROUND WATER QUALITY

With the need to continue the prudent and sustained use of the nation's renewable natural resources, it is the policy of USDA to help protect water users and the natural environment from exposure to harmful substances in ground water, especially in rural areas, and to enhance ground water quality where appropriate.

Accordingly, USDA will:

- a. Support the prudent use and careful management of nutrients and chemicals in agricultural and silvicultural production with the objective of safeguarding ground water quality. Where ground water quality enhancement is needed, foster alternative crop management systems, improvements in the management of nutrients and chemicals, and reductions in the use of inputs as appropriate.
- b. Advocate and foster programs, activities, and practices that can prevent the harmful contamination of ground water from agricultural, silvicultural, and other rural sources in order to minimize, or make unnecessary, regulatory restrictions on the use of chemicals and nutrients needed for agricultural production.

4. USDA POLICY FOR RESEARCH, INFORMATION-EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

- a. Continue to conduct and support research, monitoring, assessment, and evaluation of: (1) factors affecting the movement of nutrients, pathogens, toxins, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural chemicals in soils and water; (2) effectiveness of efforts to protect ground water quality; (3) procedures to predict the effects of changes in chemical management; (4) effects of agricultural and silvicultural practices on the movement of nutrients, toxins, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural chemicals in ground water; (5) economic benefits of agricultural chemical uses; (6) economic effects of various strategies to reduce ground water contamination; and (7) relative hazards to animal and human health of substances in soil and ground water.
- b. Provide both nationwide and site-specific information, education, and technical assistance to private landowners to encourage them to use agricultural and silvicultural practices, including non-chemical methods of pest control that can minimize the risks of ground water contamination levels that are harmful to public health and the environment.
- c. Provide information and education to people and communities in rural areas about methods to maintain safe wells; to avoid local contamination of water by pathogens, agricultural chemicals, nutrients, and other substances; to obtain tests of ground water quality; and to treat their water to remove natural and artificial contaminants where needed.

5. USDA POLICY FOR COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

- a. Strive to assure that Departmental policies and programs are implemented in a manner that encourages agricultural and silvicultural practices that safeguard ground water quality.
- b. Coordinate with state and federal agencies, manufacturers, and others to help ensure agricultural and silvicultural land users apply nutrients and pesticides correctly. Coordinate with and encourage state and federal agencies, manufacturers, and others to help agricultural and silvicultural land users avoid or minimize adverse affects on ground water quality.

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