**Cleaner Water & Better Soils Here We Come**

***First Four Agribusinesses Achieve Nutrient Management Certification***

It’s called 4R NY Nutrient Stewardship Certification. Its goal is to reduce nutrient runoff from farms which contributes to water quality programs.

“The New York State Agribusiness Association (NYSABA) is proud to announce the first four agribusiness to pass audit under the 4R NY Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program. This program provides a consistent, recognized standard for agricultural retailers in New York for the long-term improvement of New York’s water quality,” reveals Sally Flis, The Fertilizer Institute Director of Agronomy and NYSABA Immediate Past President.

The 4R NY Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program encourages agricultural retailers, nutrient service providers and other certified professionals to adopt proven best practices through the 4Rs, which refers to using the Right Source of Nutrients at the Right Rate and the Right Time in the Right Place. Participants agree to annual compliance audits with requirements increasing every year.

This approach provides a science-based framework for plant nutrition management and sustained crop production, while considering specific individual farms’ needs. The standards were created in collaboration with universities, non-government organizations, state and federal, agribusiness, and producer input. Key contributors include; The Fertilizer Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Conservation Service, NYS Soil and Water, NYS Agriculture and Markets, Cornell University, Cornell Extension, SUNY Morrisville, New York Farm Bureau, Ohio Agribusiness Association, New York Corn and Soybean Growers Association, the Northeast Region Certified Crop Adviser Program, and members of the NYS Agribusiness Association.

The standards are divided into three parts, covering: initial training and ongoing education, monitoring of 4R implementation, and nutrient recommendation and application. The standards are cumulative with a three-year phase in period. Twenty-nine criteria are met in year one. Eight additional criteria must be met in year two. Six additional criteria are added in year three.

**Common Ground**

Four companies began the audit process the last week in August. Western New York Crop Management Association Cooperative, Inc. (WNY Crop) in Warsaw, T & S Crop Service Inc. in Warsaw, Growmark FS in Caledonia, and Carolina Eastern-Vail, Inc.(CaroVail) in Salem represent over 534,000 farm acres in New York State. Though very different in scope, each of the four has stewardship written into their business plans.

WNY Crop, a membership cooperative offering crop advising, covers the largest amount of acreage of the four. Since 1986, they have worked with farmers across the region to increase crop input management efficiency and bolster environmental responsibility. Membership in the association has grown to include over 400 farms, comprising over 400,000 acres of consulted crop land.

Just down the road, T & S Crop is family owned and operated providing growers with Custom Application, Liquid Fertilizer, Crop Protection products and Seed.

“We understand that returning nutrients to the land through strategic fertilizer management is vital in order for farms to maximize crop production in today's environment,” notes Seth Sheehan of T & S.

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GROWMARK Inc. has been a national leader in the 4R initiative, so it came as little surprised when the GROWMARK FS location in Caledonia participated in the voluntary program.

“More than ever before, it is important that we demonstrate to our growers and our communities that we are focused on a plentiful and safe food supply. By applying the 4R Concepts to our nutrient plans, we are helping our growers produce quality fruits, vegetables, forages and grains while maximizing the using the nutrients in the plant and reducing the opportunity for them to leach or move through the soil,” notes Dale Bartholomew, 4R liaison for the location. “Today we have ample resources of fresh water and our goal is to maintain and improve our water resource for generations to come.”

Beyond providing custom application, fertilizer, crop protection, and seed to the agricultural community, CaroVail- Salem also has active specialty divisions. CaroVail offers organic products and supports a strong Turf & Ornamental Division, which specializes in providing custom products for athletic fields, golf courses, parks/public greenways, and the custom lawn care business.

“Our mission is to recommend the best practices to improve the long-term sustainability of your farm. Following the 4R Nutrient Stewardship practices and becoming certified not only keeps us accountable with our practices, but allows us to show that we are doing everything in our power to maintain sustainable practices and do everything that we can to keep our environment clean & healthy – all while taking care of our crops, too,” explains Katherine Vail, third-generation agribusiness woman at Carolina Eastern-Vail, popularly known as CaroVail.

New York has nearly 7.2 million acres of farmland, accounting for about one-quarter of the State's land area. Of New York's total farmland, about 60 percent is cropland, 24 percent is woodland, and 10 percent is pastureland.

**Cleaner Water**

New York State has more than 7,600 waterbodies, two Great Lakes and over 70,000 miles of rivers and streams.

Most algae are harmless and are an important part of the food web. Certain types of algae can grow quickly and form blooms, which can over all or portions of a waterbody. Even large blooms are not necessarily harmful. However, some species of algae can produce toxins that can be harmful to people and animals. Blooms of algal species that can produce toxins are referred to as harmful algal blooms (HABs). HABs usually occur in nutrient-rich waters, particularly during hot, calm weather.

“Agriculture has pushed hard to increase efficiency while being environmentally responsible. Agribusiness has a key role to play in this effort. As average summer temperatures creep higher, we must do our part to reduce HAB’s access to nutrients,” says Jeremy Schulz, NYSABA President. “We’re excited to announce the first-year certification of these companies.”

“Through participating, we hope to raise awareness to those around us about nutrient sustainability. By following the 4R guidelines and educating our clients, we are making a deliberate effort to remain sustainable and keep our nutrients where they belong – in our soil & taken up by our plants!” says Vail.