

Developing an Environmental Policy Statement for a Farm/Ranch or Business

Purpose (Learning Objective): This presentation is meant to stimulate conversations about environmental issues important to the future of agriculture. It starts with identification of large, encompassing issues and guides the application of that knowledge to a specific farm, ranch or agribusiness through the development of an environmental policy statement. This module also includes guidance on how the students (or farmers/ranchers) can use the policy statement to communicate about their environmental ethic to customers, and the general public.

Why Is This Important?

An environmental policy statement (EPS) is a proactive way to communicate about a farm's environmental stewardship ethic. At first glance, this might seem like a "feel good" exercise with little practical value. However, the authors' experience has shown that farmers and ranchers are quick to identify ways they can use the policy statement for their business. The exercise stimulates conversations that many owners or managers have not previously initiated with family or employees.

An EPS is short and consists of several specific statements. These statements reflect a general description of the operation and its most important environmental issues. The EPS also communicates commitments to regulatory compliance, continual improvement and stewardship. While these statements appear to be prescribed, there is a great deal of room for an operation to personalize and create an EPS that reflects their individual values and goals.

Though presented here as a valuable stand alone tool, an environmental policy statement (EPS) is actually one piece of an environmental management system (EMS). An EMS is a systematic approach to environmental decision making. It seeks to formalize processes and procedures and integrate all of the different aspect of a farm operation into a single coherent plan. Systematic management is becoming more common in farm and ranch management. This module can stand alone or serve as a springboard for further study on farm business management, EMS, environmental regulations and communications.

Prior to this activity/program:

High school/Jr. College Teachers: Students should have some background knowledge on the types of agriculture in their area. County and state data can be found through the national Census of Agriculture: <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>. Students should also be aware of environmentally significant features in their area (ground and surface water, recreation area, population centers, etc.) as well as any controversial topics related to animal agriculture and environmental.

Extension Faculty/Staff: If possible, provide participants with a copy of Worksheet 1 "Discussion Guide: Environmental Issues Important to My Farm/Ranch" prior to the program. Instruct them to discuss the questions on the worksheet with family, business partners, and others involved in the farm/ranch and bring a completed copy to the program. The group discussion during the program can be used to compare and contrast conversations that were held on-farm.

Suggested Presentation Outline: (50 minutes)

1. Introduction of environmental issues. (Presentation slides 1-11). 10 minutes
2. Discussion (Presentation slides 12-14; Worksheet 1 is optional for ag students). 15 minutes
3. Introduction to environmental policy statements (Presentation slides 15-19). 5 minutes
4. Activity—developing a policy statement (Slide 20; Handouts 1-2, Worksheet 2) 10 minutes
5. Communicating Stewardship (Slides 21-24; Handout 3) 5 minutes
6. Summary or Evaluation/Assessment 5 minutes

Instructional Materials:

Presentation Slides: (24 slides; annotated; .ppt format). Environmental Stewardship: Defining Your Ethic in a Policy Statement (preview online) <http://slidesha.re/EPSPreview> or (download; 3 MB)

<http://create.extension.org/sites/default/files/environmental%20policy%20statement%20instructor%20presentation.ppt>

Worksheets/Handouts: Download PDF if you use them as-is. Use RTF if you want to edit or customize.

<http://create.extension.org/sites/default/files/EPSPacket%20worksheets%20and%20handouts.pdf>

or

<http://create.extension.org/sites/default/files/EPSPacket%20worksheets%20and%20handouts.rtf>

- Worksheet 1. Environmental Issues Important to My Farm or Ranch
- Handout 1. Example Stewardship Commitments
- Handout 2. Example Environmental Policy Statements
- Worksheet 2. Environmental Policy Statement Template
- Handout 3. Follow Up: Using Your Environmental Policy Statement

Evaluation/Assessment:

- Example quiz/review questions
<http://create.extension.org/sites/default/files/quiz%20questions%20environmental%20policy%20statement.rtf>
- Example grading rubric (homework or in-class assignment)
<http://create.extension.org/sites/default/files/Environmental%20Policy%20Statement%20Grading%20Rubric.rtf>
- Program evaluation survey
<http://create.extension.org/sites/default/files/evaluation%20survey%20environmental%20policy%20statement.rtf>

Enrichment Activities/Independent Practice (Optional):

- Have students work with a farmer/rancher (individually or in teams) to develop an EPS specific to that farm/ranch.
- Create a video about the farm with the EPS as the narration and the background footage a mixture of people and pictures demonstrating positive stewardship
- Create a press release about the EPS and/or conservation practices recently implemented on a farm or ranch

Connections to SAE projects

Entrepreneurship/Production

- Students can be encouraged to develop an EPS for their SAE project or business
- An EPS can be submitted as part of their business plan or application for loans or cost share for conservation activities

Placement

- Students can develop an EPS for their employer and work with employer to develop other ways to promote environmental stewardship in their business

Connections to FFA Awards/Contests

This module may be helpful for students preparing for Career Development Events such as prepared public speaking, extemporaneous public speaking, agricultural communications, agricultural issues, environment and natural resources, and others. The EPS could be included as part of a student's application for proficiency awards in almost every area, especially entrepreneurship applications.

Alignment with AFNR, SAE projects, and FFA Contests

National Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (AFNR) Career Cluster Content Standards:

Life Knowledge and Cluster Skills (CS)

- **CS.01** Performance Element: Premier Leadership: Acquire the skills necessary to positively influence others.
- **CS.06** Performance element: Examine the importance of health, safety and environmental management systems in organizations and their importance to performance and regulatory compliance

Agribusiness Systems (ABS)

- **ABS.02** Performance element: Utilize appropriate management planning principles in AFNR business enterprises. (Especially **ABS.02.02** Performance indicator: Read, interpret, evaluate and write a mission statement to guide business goals, objectives and resource allocation)

Animal Systems (AS)

- **AS.08.** Performance element. Analyze environmental factors associated with animal production.

Environmental Service Systems

- **ESS.02.** Performance element: Assess the impact of policies and regulations on environmental service systems.
- **ESS.04.01.** Performance indicator: Use pollution control measures to maintain a safe facility environment.

Natural Resource Systems

- **NRS.05.**Performance element: Use effective methods and venues to communicate natural resource processes to the public.

To find other modules and their alignment with the standard, download the BELAA-AFNR alignment matrix <http://www.extension.org/pages/32944/educational-modules:-building-environmental-leaders-in-animal-agriculture-belaa>).

For More Information

Recommended Internet search terms: environmental policy statement, farm environmental policy statement, agriculture environmental policy statement, environmental management system for agriculture, farm environmental management system, Ag EMS

In additional to the instructional materials provided with this module, other recommended reading:

Environmental policy statement for agriculture:

Utah State University http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/AG_AEMS-04.pdf

Environmental Management Systems and Agriculture:

- eXtension [http://www.extension.org/pages/Agriculture Environmental Management Systems](http://www.extension.org/pages/Agriculture_Environmental_Management_Systems)
- Utah State University <http://extension.usu.edu/htm/publications/by=category/category=70>
- US Environmental Protection Agency <http://www.epa.gov/oecaagct/tems.html>
- University of Wisconsin <http://www.uwex.edu/agems/>

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has developed and maintains an international standard for EMS, ISO 14001 (go to http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue.htm and search for 14001). Also consult: your local extension office, soil & water conservation district USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, zoning & planning commission, agricultural organizations, and others.

Connect and Interact

This (and other modules in this series) is posted on the NAAE Communities of Practice wiki <http://www.naae.org/communities>. (Search for BELAA)

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/envagleaders>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/envagleaders>

National Young Farmers Educational Association (NYFEA) <http://nyfea.org>

Livestock & Poultry Environmental Learning Center <http://www.extension.org/animal+manure+mangement>

YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/user/lpelc>

Teaching Notes:

What would you keep the same, change, add, or remove the next time you teach this lesson?

Acknowledgements

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