

## **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program**

Seeing the signs in front of fields and barns showing pride that the farm is Environmentally Verified has become a familiar sight across Michigan's countryside. But what do those signs mean? They mean those farms have been verified as implementing their on-farm goals to protect water quality, reduce the risk of erosion, nutrient loss, and spills, and use practices to enhance soil health, maximize animal care, and protect habitats.

The farms who voluntarily participate in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) go through a rigorous process to earn both the bragging rights the farmyard sign displays as well as legal protections under state statute. They renew that verification every 5 years to ensure the farm continues to meet its environmental goals, and to update any practices needed to reflect changes in the farm as well as new technologies to help farmers protect their environmental quality.

MAEAP is unique in the nation: it is a program started and operated as a partnership between farmers, agricultural groups, universities, conservation districts, and state and federal agencies. It is voluntary, confidential, and available to any farm statewide. MAEAP is third-party verified, meaning after a farm works with their local technician to develop and implement their plan, a verifier from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development visits the farm to make sure all practices the farm worked on are complete and meet MAEAP standards. This makes the work farmers do to protect their soil, water, and farmstead that much more credible because an external partner has verified its completion.

Why would a farmer want to participate in MAEAP? Here are the top ten reasons to reach out to your technician to get started!

### **1) Flexibility: MAEAP offers verification through 4 systems:**

- **Livestock:** Care of animals and managing their manure
- **Cropping:** Nutrient management, irrigation, pest and weed control, and soil health in cropped areas or greenhouses
- **Farmstead:** Water supplies, fuel and chemical storage, buildings, and emergency planning
- **Forest/Wetland/Habitats:** Enhancement and protection of timber stands and tree lots, wetlands, and wildlife habitats for sustainable forestry, species protection, or hunting



Photo by MDARD

- 2) **Credibility:** Being a third-party verified program, you can share practices, environmental benefits, and your verification with buyers, co-ops, commodity groups, or others to demonstrate your commitment to environmental stewardship.
- 3) **Ensure compliance with environmental regulations and Right to Farm Standards:** MAEAP is designed to help farmers meet and in many cases exceed regulations and Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices that provide statutory protection under Michigan's Right to Farm law, to provide peace of mind that the farm is doing what it needs to do for soil, air, and water quality.



Photo by Michigan Farm News

- 4) Direct Marketing: If you are MAEAP verified and sell your products directly to consumers, you can get permission through MDARD to use the MAEAP logo on your products, to improve your visibility and appeal for consumers looking for farms committed to environmental protection.
- 5) Legal protections: If you are MAEAP verified and using all the practices in your plan, you will not be required to pay civil fines or penalties if you have a spill or release due to circumstances like an act of God weather event. Also, if you are MAEAP verified and your watershed is designated with a limit for pollutants (known as a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL), your farm will be considered to already be in compliance with any TMDL-related requirements.
- 6) Confidentiality: The work you do with your local technician and verifier are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act or any other public release without your permission.
- 7) Cost: MAEAP is free! The program is paid for by registration fees on pesticides and tonnage fees on fertilizers sold wholesale in Michigan, so there is no cost to farmers for the assistance of the local technician or the MAEAP verifier.





Photo by Delta Conservation District

- 8) Insurance Discounts: If you have Farm Bureau insurance, you will be eligible for discounts on farm liability policies that grow the more systems you are verified in.
- 9) Higher ranking for USDA farm bill conservation programs: Farm bill conservation programs are highly competitive and there isn't enough money to go around for all the farmers who apply for financial assistance with implementing conservation practices. If you are working toward or are already MAEAP verified, your application will rank higher so you will be more likely to receive those funds.



Photo by Monroe Conservation District

10) Work at your own pace: there is no required timeline for working toward or achieving MAEAP verification. You can work on activities in a way and on a timeline that meets the needs of your farm, and have access to expert advice at any step you need it.

**Additional Resources:**

[Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program](#)

[Your local Conservation District \(where your technician is housed\)](#)

[Michigan Farm Bureau Policy #80, Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program](#)

[Michigan Right to Farm Act](#)

[Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices](#)

[USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: Farm Bill Conservation Programs](#)