Global Partnership on Nutrient Management
BMP Case Study

Overview

Name: Gulf of Mexico Project

Location/Terrain: Mississippi River Basin

Crop(s): Various crops grown along the Mississippi River

Nutrient(s): Nutrient overload from agricultural run off

Rationale: The aim of this project is to reduce the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico by addressing nutrient run off from agriculture intensive regions along the Mississippi.

Issue(s) of Concern/Challenges:

The hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico is the second largest hypoxic zone in the world. This project addresses this challenge by reducing agricultural runoff through nutrient management programs along the Mississippi River.

Practice Objectives:

To implement regionally specific nutrient management programs which will reduce the amount of non-point source agricultural pollution, thus helping decrease hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

Practice Description:

This three-phase project coordinated local identification of nutrient reduction strategies, formation of local agricultural coalitions and the development of nutrient reduction action plans, using the best available practices transferable to other watersheds.

Outcomes:

Local partnerships were established in three Mississippi River sub-basins. The participation of agribusinesses, agricultural associations and agricultural research associations were secured to support local promotion and adoption of best nutrient management systems. Partners were brought together by facilitating meetings between agricultural industry leaders, farmers, watershed groups, county government, university extension, crop consultants and agricultural dealers. The Southeastern Minnesota, Upper Wabash, and Missouri Bootheel Nutrient Management Coalitions, along with subcommittees, all developed strategic and action plans in order to plan and perform the work of incorporating best agricultural conservation systems for using nutrients efficiently on the farm, thus reducing nutrient loads to the Mississippi River.

Several Conferences and Tours were held as a part of the project. In 2010, the Minnesota coalition hosted the Nutrients in our Environment Conference attended by 300 people. The coalition hosted a second event in 2011, the Nutrient Efficiency and Management Conference, designed to help more than 300 attendees better understand water challenges. The Wabash River Headwaters Tour provided an overview of the Gulf of Mexico project, in 2009. In 2010, the Wisconsin: Not Just a Dairy Tour, allowed participants to view innovative nutrient management practices.

The Missouri Bootheel group launched the Generations Program, which provides corn nitrate stalk testing, to provide a "win-win" for corn producers and FFA students. The FFA Chapters earn dollars for special projects and conferences and producers learn valuable information for fine-tuning nitrogen applications during the next growing season. Seventy five corn growers in several counties within the watershed project participated in the free testing program during the summer of 2010.

Significance:

This project showed that group diversity (many different regions involved) can attract funding, participation and expertise from agribusiness. It showed that grassroots initiatives such as these ultimately bring success because they are championed by local people who choose to make a change where they live and work.

Data/Graphs:

Image: National Park Service

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CTIC Conservation Technology Information Center

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