

Environmental Policy Statements: Explaining What You Do, How You Do It, and Where You Want To Go

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Introduction

Companies and businesses often create policy statements that summarize the objectives and goals of that business and establish the criteria for meeting those objectives and goals. Your farm may or may not already have a policy or “mission” statement that summarizes your objectives and commitments. Many companies are now realizing the benefits of also drafting an “environmental” policy statement. You as a farmer may also benefit from this process. By drafting an environmental policy statement, you can begin to “flesh out” what is likely already understood and practiced on your farm, and also provide a framework for future improvement and resource conservation.



Farmers, including this peanut producer, can benefit from the creation of an environmental policy statement.

A policy statement is a great opportunity to “flesh out” what you do on your operation. Take the time to evaluate the history of your operation, where you want to go in the future, and how you want to get there.

What This Document Covers:

- The Reason for an Environmental Policy Statement (EPS)
- The Basic Components of an Environmental Policy Statement
- How an EPS fits into an Environmental Management System

Why Create an Environmental Policy Statement?

What do you do in your operation? How do your management practices result in or promote resource conservation? What environmental principles are important to you? How do you manage your operation to conform to these environmental principles? How do your operation and activities affect your neighbors, clients and community?

You have likely answered these questions either by yourself or in conversations with others, but have you ever written them down? Do your employees or co-workers know the answers to these questions? Creating a policy statement answers these questions and more. It ensures that everyone involved with the operation has an understanding of the present and future goals of your business.

**Creating a policy statement helps clearly answer the question:
“What makes you a good environmental steward?”**

An EPS is the first step to operating under an environmental management system (EMS). It should provide a clear, unifying vision for the farm and should guide farm decisions and activities. This statement should be developed and reviewed by farm family members, staff and partners on a regular basis to ensure it meets the current needs of your operation. Once you have developed a policy statement, post the policy in work areas and refer to it to remind all people who work on the farm of their commitment to environmental stewardship.

What Makes Up an Environmental Policy Statement?

A policy statement can include several components. At a minimum, it should include commitments to:

- Pollution prevention
- Compliance with all pertinent laws and regulations
- Continual improvement

Some tips for writing your environmental policy statement are:

- Keep it simple
- Make it your own, not a “cookie-cutter” copy of someone else’s policy
- Expect to revise it in the future to meet the changing needs of your operation
- Make sure that it is appropriate to the nature and scale of the farm
- Address local environmental concerns/principles
- Ensure that it is clear, concise and implemented at all levels of the farm

Including environmental stewardship principles in your policy statement is important.

Listed below are several examples of principles that may be included in your environmental policy statement. Including these principles allows others to see what you are committed to as a producer that benefits the environment and community around you. After selecting a few principles most important to the farm, you should be able to answer the question, “What makes you a good environmental steward?”

Sample Environmental Stewardship Principles:

“This operation places importance on...”

- “...being a good neighbor and member of the community.”
- “...compliance with all environmental regulations.”
- “...regular reviews of environmental risks and identifying priority environmental issues.”
- “...managing riparian areas and other buffers to surface water to protect and enhance the quality of the water.”
- “...responsibly conserving and managing the soil and water resources of our operation while producing quality crops and products.”
- “...efficient management of nutrients including those that enter, leave and are recycled within the cropping system.”

After thinking about the principles and components that should go into your policy statement, look at these examples that are in two different formats. You can use these as a template for your own statement.

Sample Environmental Policy Statements

Paragraph style:

Sample 1) Our farm is committed to a cleaner environment for the health of our communities and the sustainability of agriculture. Through **technical assistance, planning and self-examination** we seek to continually improve our management practices so we may continue to produce quality products while **preventing pollution**, complying with all pertinent regulations and maintaining good relationships with our neighbors. Pursuant to these goals we will maintain honest, effective communication with officials, our neighbors, employees and other stakeholders.

Sample 2) Our farm aims to produce the best possible product in an environmentally responsible manner. We manage animal health to ensure their well-being and a high level of production and quality. We are committed to properly managing and applying animal manure to cropland so as to achieve optimum production while preventing pollution. We are committed to complying with all pertinent environmental regulations and to continually improving the environmental performance of our operations. **By regularly reviewing our actions and our goals**, we sustain our farm’s profitability while continually improving environmental stewardship.

Sample 3) Davis Brothers Farm has a long history of producing quality crops while maintaining a healthy environment. Through our efforts, we hope to keep our farm productive so that future generations can operate this farm while continuing the tradition of sustainable production. This will be achieved by **setting attainable immediate goals and keeping good records** to track our progress toward those goals. We also **strive to be a good neighbor through community activities and involvement**.

Outline style:

**Environmental Policy Statement for:
Jones Family Farms**

Purpose:

Jones Family Farms is a diversified operation with poultry, cow/calf and hay production. The farm employs its husband and wife owners on a full-time basis and two employees on a part-time basis. The families of the owners provide additional help as needed.

Environmental Issues:

Jones Family Farms is located near a small housing development along a busy highway; therefore, our impact on our neighbors is an important aspect of our operations. We will strive to maintain a neat and professional appearance on our farmstead. Litter applications will be made with consideration to potential impacts on neighbors. We also inform our neighbors of the importance of litter application and the steps we take to be responsible in our nutrient management.

Compliance:

Jones Family Farms is committed to compliance with all pertinent environmental laws and regulations. We will develop our own procedures and guidelines to safeguard the health and safety of our families, employees or neighbors when we feel laws and regulations are not sufficient.

Stewardship Principles:

Our profitability depends upon maintaining long-term productivity and minimizing waste. The principles that guide our operations are:

- To manage riparian areas in such a way that protects and enhances the associated plant communities and quality of the water.
- To preserve soil quality by minimizing erosion and maintaining soil characteristics that contribute to its productivity.

Continuous Improvement:

We are committed to reviewing our environmental risks on a regular basis and identifying ways to improve our environmental performance.

Signed _____

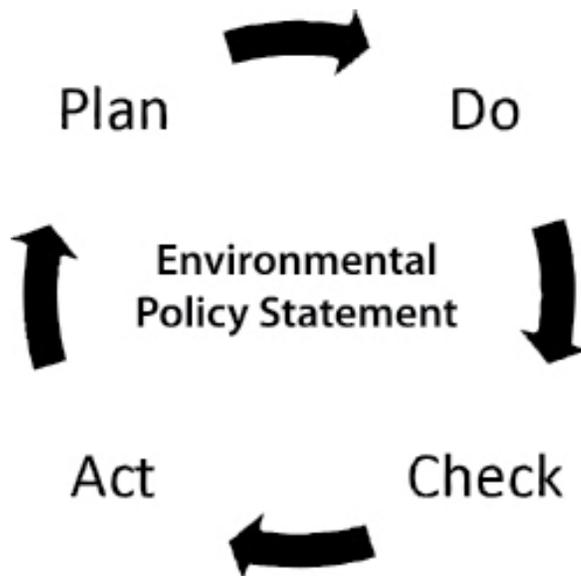
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Signed _____

Date: _____

Policy Statements and EMS: The Connection to Continued Environmental Stewardship

An Environmental Management System assists producers operating in a world full of change. It is a nationally and internationally recognized business plan used by farmers and agricultural producers that helps you develop your own strategy for integrating environmental considerations into production decisions. It focuses on increasing efficiency and managing environmental impacts through the process of “plan, do, check, act.”



An Environmental Policy Statement is at the core of the EMS process.

An environmental management system helps you develop your own strategy for integrating environmental considerations into production decisions.

The EMS process offers something to operations large and small in any type production and allows you to examine your production system from start to finish. For producers who currently incorporate environmental considerations into management decisions, an EMS is a way to document positive practices.

The Ultimate Goal of an Environmental Policy Statement

An environmental policy statement (and consequently an EMS) provides the framework for setting environmental objectives and goals and addressing resource concerns. All future management of the farm operation should first be tested by the question, “Is this compatible with our environmental policy statement?” However, a policy statement is not written in stone. It should be a “living document,” growing and changing as your operation changes. In order to keep your policy statement and EMS current with your practices, you should review and revise it often.

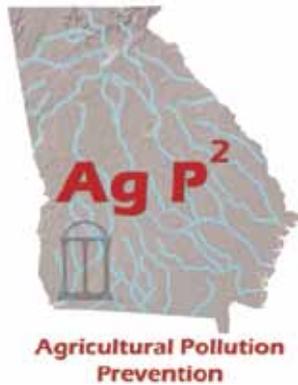
More Information

There is much more information on what an EMS is and how one can benefit your operation. Several other states have begun implementing these plans with their producers, including Wisconsin, Iowa, Virginia and Nebraska, and have produced material documenting EMS use. Australia has also developed a national manual for implementation of EMS that qualifies for the international ISO140001 standards. Companion publications will be released that further explain agricultural EMS for Georgia. Previously, the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension developed an EMS document specifically designed for poultry producers: Georgia Poultry Environmental Management Systems Guidebook (Special Bulletin #42, March 2004). Also visit UGA's Agricultural Pollution Prevention (AgP²) page at <http://www.agp2.org>, which hosts information on EMS's through the Partnership for a Sustainable Georgia AgTrack Program.

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