

Whole-Farm Sustainability Guide



This guide serves as a top-level introduction into sustainability. It can be used as a reference tool and self-assessment when considering farming practices and to help engage in discussions with consumers regarding on-farm sustainability.

Sustainable farming is becoming even more important as a decreasing number of American farmers are working to help feed a growing world. Implementing sustainable farming practices can be easy. In most cases, they're practices that farmers are already using. And some of them can even lower your costs. More and more, manufacturers want to ensure they are purchasing their raw materials from sources that are doing their part to preserve the earth for tomorrow's generation. While many farming methods used on American farms today fall within these practices, this guide may serve as a verification of your sustainability efforts and provide talking points you can use when you get questions about your farm.

This guide provides the key checkpoints that are relevant to most buyers as the movement to source sustainably grown products becomes more prevalent. Mark the boxes that apply to your sustainable farming practices and reference this guide in conversations about your farm.

Production Management:

- Keeping detailed records of all farming practices may help with planting and application strategies for the next year. It can also help you learn best-management practices for each field.
 - I keep detailed records of planted acreage and annual yields for each field
 - I keep detailed records of all inputs for each field
 - I know and utilize proper calibration levels for my planting equipment

Tillage Practices:

- Reduced-tillage practices help preserve the soil's nutrients, reduce run-off and erosion and result in more water availability for plants. It also reduces labor and machinery wear, while increasing the organic matter in the soil.
 - I use a reduced-tillage practice, such as no-till, strip-till or vertical tillage
 - Percentage of the crops I planted last year that utilized a reduced-tillage practice

Water-Management Practices:

- Water management includes a variety of possible practices, such as no-till, grass filter strips, cover crops and more. These practices help slow runoff from fields, trapping and filtering sediment, nutrients, pesticides and other potential pollutants before they reach surface waters. Utilizing low-drift nozzles on application equipment can help target chemical application, as well as reduce excess spray and loss of product.
 - I use the following practices:
 - No-Till
 - Grass Filter Strips
 - Cover Crops

- Low-Drift Nozzles
- I follow recommended and research-based irrigation practices for my farm (amount, timing)
- I utilize properly installed drain tiles on my farm
- I monitor water quality on my farm through local water-conservation partnerships
- I use proper calibration levels for my spray equipment to limit overspray and runoff

Crop Rotation Practices:

- Crop rotation is a key element to sustainable farming. It is a very effective solution to controlling pests due to preferences some insects have for certain plants. Crop rotation is effective in controlling disease resistance as well. Also, by practicing crop rotation, farmers are able to replenish vital nutrients, such as nitrogen fixed by soybeans, with less need for chemical fertilizers.
 - I practice crop rotation on my farm
 - I change crop succession in my fields:
 - Yearly
 - Bi-Annually
 - Other

Nutrient Management:

- Nutrient management is important to protect and build more productive soil, reduce over application and protect water quality.
 - I participate in soil testing every two to three years
 - I keep an up-to-date nutrient-management plan for my fields
 - I know the recommended levels of nutrients for my soil
 - I apply adequate nutrients to the soil as needed

Crop Diversity and Pest Management:

- Crop diversity includes planting both different species and different varieties to avoid food shortages in unfavorable conditions. It helps maintain healthy and productive ecosystems. Crop diversity can also help control pest-control tolerances such as resistance to treatments.
 - I plant different varieties of crops to address the needs of my farm, such as water-tolerant, drought-resistant, disease-resistant and herbicide-tolerant varieties
 - I scout my crops to detect issues in the field and use chemical intervention only when needed
 - I limit the development of pest resistance by using proper management practices, such as proper timing and spray coverage
 - I rotate types of chemicals used on my farm to prevent resistance buildup

Sustainable farming is important to securing food production for years to come. However, becoming sustainable is not an overnight change, but rather a journey. Being able to talk about your farm's sustainability performance will help you stay ahead of the regulatory curve.

For more in-depth self-assessments and surveys, please visit www.FieldtoMarket.org or www.FieldRise.com.