

Fertiliser industry takes first steps to accreditation

Better management of the environment, food safety issues and the health and safety of all fertiliser users is at the heart of a newly introduced three-tier training and accreditation program for Australia's fertiliser industry.

The Fertcare program was developed by the Fertiliser Industry Federation of Australia (FIFA) and the Australian Fertiliser Services Association (AFSA), primarily to address the environmental issues associated with using fertiliser.

Nick Drew, Executive Manager for FIFA and AFSA, said while the roll-out of Fertcare training and accreditation was still in its early stages, it had the potential to significantly improve fertiliser handling and use practices right across the country.

"One of the key aims of the Fertcare program is for all Australian farmers to receive consistent and quality advice on the handling and use of fertilisers and soil ameliorants," he said.

"The program has been designed to lift the skills and knowledge of everyone involved in the supply and distribution of fertilisers, recognising that there are some serious consequences for misuse."

Nick said the program was strongly backed by the industry and likely to be adopted by the vast majority of Australian businesses involved in fertiliser supply and distribution. It has been developed with significant support from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and National Landcare Program.

Fertcare training is conducted at three levels, aimed at logistics providers, sales staff and nutrition advisers.

Level A training involves developing a basic understanding of fertilisers and soil ameliorants, such as physical identification, understanding labeling, storage and handling characteristics and the main environmental and food safety risks.

A more advanced course for sales staff, Level B, provides basic training in plant nutrition and gives participants greater knowledge of the nutrient issues relating to the environment and food safety.

Level C training is aimed at agronomists and other nutrition advisers. The course covers environmental risk management, environmental stewardship practices, regulations and label requirements, sampling and food safety issues. With recognition of prior competency, agronomists can become fully accredited Fertcare advisers.

Nutrient Management Systems developed Level B and C of the Fertcare program and run regular training courses across the country.

Chris Dowling, Director of Nutrient Management Systems, said the courses have already been popular in cotton growing areas such.

He said the training programs examine the potential environmental risks associated with cotton fertiliser strategies — such as nutrient losses in run off water, over-application and leaching. Any improvements that can be made to reduce off-site environmental problems could also save farmers money through reduced wastage.

"The cotton industry is using techniques that minimise losses of nutrients, particularly phosphorus, by using best management practices for minimising pesticide losses," he said.

"However, complacency with the selection of fertiliser rates to meet higher yield potentials may lead to decreases in efficiency and increased environmental risks in areas such as ground water quality and greenhouse gas emissions."

For more information on Fertcare, contact FIFA on 02 6230 6987 or Nutrient Management Systems on 07 3206 4677.

