



BULLETIN # 01-2019

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Ontario 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification

4R Certification is a voluntary program designed to allow agri-retailers in Ontario to align their business practices with the sustainability principles of 4R Nutrient Stewardship, as verified by 37 auditable standards. In co-operation with the 4R Ontario Steering Committee, Fertilizer Canada launched the 4R Certification program in 2018 and have to-date completed over 20 pre-audits with agri-retailer facilities. Recently, three of these facilities achieved full 4R certification by completing all of the audit requirements, as verified by a third party audit.

To ensure consistent interpretation among agri-retail facilities for audits, this technical bulletin intends to provide clarification on:

1. Full service, recommendation only and application only customer definitions, for the purposes of customer sample selection during an audit;
2. Main, hub, branch, and satellite facility certifications; and
3. Interpretation of the percent compliance and the compliance cycles.

Types of services provided

Generally, customers of Nutrient Service Providers (NSP) may fall under the following three categories:

Full Service – soil sampling, crop recommendations, and custom-application for a grower customer is provided for at least 51% of their fields in the most recent growing season.

Recommendation only – a grower customer is provided with a crop plan or guidance on recommended nutrient rates, purchases nutrients and either receives no custom application or custom application is on 50% or more of their fields in the most recent growing season by the NSP.

Application only – a grower customer receives custom-application services on 50% or less of their fields in the most recent growing season, but no crop plans or guidance on recommended nutrient rates are provided by the NSP (i.e. nutrient recommendations are provided by a third party).



Main, Hub, Branch, and Satellite facility certifications

In many cases, NSPs may have multiple facilities in various locations, which may share capital and human resources between multiple facilities. These facilities may be:

- a. *Main* location – defined as the ‘headquarters’ of the agri-retailer company. This location may be a head office from an administration standpoint in addition to providing traditional agri-retail operations.

Note:

- Head offices that provide administration services only are beyond the scope of the Ontario 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification program; and
 - If an agri-retail location is a “stand alone” full service facility it will be deemed a *main* location.
- b. *Hub* location – defined as the largest location in a region open year-round and under direct management, but also may provide “*support*” services to other facilities (See: branch and satellite location definitions).
 - c. *Branch* location – defined as a location in a region open year-round, but is under direct management of the *hub* or *main* location.
 - d. *Satellite* location – defined as a location that is seasonally open facility under management of either the *branch* or *main* location.

It is strongly recommended that any agri-retail facility aiming to become Ontario 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certified (through passing a full audit) should complete a pre-audit at the specific location that is seeking certification so that the documentation, policies, procedures and infrastructure that are reviewed during the pre-audit are “in-house”. Best practice is that the *main* or *hub* location of an NSP become Ontario 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certified first, to help company staff gain insight into the requirements of the audit process that can then be transitioned thereafter to satellite locations under management.

Interpretation of the percent compliance:

In order to balance program adoption with credibility, the 4R Ontario Steering Committee has identified and proposed a number incremental improvements in percent compliance over the course of successive 2 year audit cycles. The proposed compliance increases over the next cycles of implementation are described in the Ontario 4R Certification Standards Manual. Each 4R Certification standard requires auditable evidence through the review of



records on file (hard copy or electronic) and has an associated percent compliance score based on implementation cycles.

As an example, standard A9 states:

Records of nutrient application include at a minimum: (1) method of application, (2) time of application, (3) field map showing locations of application; nutrient source and rate , (4) weather (temperature and precipitation) conditions at time of application, and (5) weather forecast for the day of application.

NSPs should interpret the compliance rate as: percent of their grower customer fields in the audit sample contain all five identified records.

In the case of standard A9, all records are required for 50% of the grower customer samples (i.e. 5 out of 10 growers randomly selected meet all 5 requirements). Additionally, having 3 out of the required 5 application record criteria for all grower samples selected does not mean that the standard has met a 60% compliance percentage.

Interpretation of the compliance cycles:

For clarification, the pre-audit and audit compliance cycles are conducted independently of each other. That is, if an NSP conducts their pre-audit in a given compliance cycle (i.e. compliance cycle 1 2018-2020), but for any reason delays or decides to complete a full audit in a subsequent compliance cycle (i.e. compliance cycle 2 2021-2022), the facility will be audited against the percent compliance in effect for the current cycle at the time of the audit.

An example is illustrated below using the compliance cycles for documentation standard D5.

Ontario 4R Certification Standards					
Req No.	Requirement	Evidence	Compliance 1 st Cycle 2018-2020	Proposed Compliance 2 nd Cycle 2020-2021	Proposed Compliance 3 rd Cycle 2021-2023
D5	Records of individual fields that are accessible to the retailer and made available to the grower/customer include, at minimum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • field boundary, soil type • current soil test results, nutrient recommendations • crop yield goals used for making recommendations, and • rates applied to each field 	Evidence should include guidance documents, acknowledgement that grower information has been conveyed. Review of records on file, can be hard copy or electronic.	50%	75%	100%



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Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the AWSA Project Manager, Anthony Laycock via email at manager@awsa.ca or 877-236-2972. You may alternatively contact Fertilizer Canada using the coordinates below.

Regards,

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