

ORCHARDS AND WATER QUALITY



Vermont orchard managers and other tree growers who meet the thresholds to qualify as farms under the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) must take measures to protect water quality in the state and are subject to regulation and/or certification by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM). Vermont farms are also eligible for technical and financial assistance through VAAFAM. For more information visit agriculture.vermont.gov.

Required Agricultural Practice (RAP) Minimum Thresholds

RAPs apply to all farm operations which meet any of the following thresholds:

- farm 4.0 contiguous acres or more;
- have an annual gross income of over \$2,000 from the sale of agricultural products; or
- have filed a 1040(F) in the past 2 years

What are the RAPs?

The Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) are required practices for agricultural operations that aim to reduce non-point source pollution from agriculture to surface waters of Vermont. The RAPs include restrictions on agricultural activities that might impact state waters, including nutrient additions to fields, buffers from surface water and ditches, and the zoning of farm structures.

Do the RAPs apply to me?

The RAPs apply to all farms, including orchards, that meet the minimum thresholds. On the next page you can find some of the RAPs that are particularly relevant to tree growers, but note that additional RAPs may apply. You can find the complete list of requirements at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/rap>.





Diversified Operations:

Additional sections of the RAPs will apply to orchards and other tree farms that also have animal, vegetable, crop, or other farming operations. To learn more, or to see the full RAPs, visit agriculture.vermont.gov/rap.

What RAPs should I be aware of?

1. Discharges and Runoff

All farms must use management strategies to prevent the discharge, runoff or leaching of agricultural waste to surface or groundwater or across property boundaries.

2. Perennial Buffers

Farmers must maintain a buffer of perennial vegetation between annual croplands and adjoining waterways. Planting trees in buffers is an accepted practice. Buffers can be harvested, but buffer soil amendments such as Sulphur are prohibited. You may not spread fertilizer or herbicide in buffers except for their establishment and maintenance.

Required Buffers:

Annual cropland must have perennial buffers of at least **10 ft** from ditches and **25 ft** from surface waters and open drains, measured to the top of the bank.

3. Soil Testing and Nutrient Applications

All orchard managers are encouraged to take soil samples from tree plots before any nutrient or fertilizer application and to only apply nutrients as necessary. Farms where mechanical application of fertilizer takes place must take soil samples of fields at least once every five years.

4. Farm Structures

The construction of farm structures is regulated by VAAF. Local fees and permits may not apply, but you must meet local and state setbacks. Contact your town zoning administrator to learn more.

NOTE: These selected RAPs are included due to their relevance to orchards and tree farms. For the full list of RAPs, visit <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/rap>.