

News Release:

4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program Celebrates a Decade of Commitment to Ohio's Water Quality

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLUMBUS, Ohio (April 16, 2024) – This year, the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program marks a significant milestone—ten years of commitment to improving water quality and advancing sustainable agricultural practices in Ohio and beyond. Launched amidst growing concerns over harmful algal blooms, notably the 2011 record-setting outbreak on Lake Erie and the Toledo water crisis of 2014, the 4R Program emerged as a cooperative, solutions-oriented effort aimed at reducing nutrient runoff into Ohio's water bodies.

The program, founded on the principles of applying fertilizers at the right source, rate, time and place, has since grown into a comprehensive, voluntary certification that encourages agricultural retailers, consultants and farmers to adopt best practices in nutrient management. These scientifically backed standards are not just about maintaining crop yields; they represent a broader commitment to environmental stewardship and the health of Ohio's waterways.

"The journey of the 4R program over the past ten years is a testament to what can be achieved when industry leaders, environmental groups and the agricultural community come together with a common goal," said Aaron Heilers, executive director of the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program. "As we celebrate this milestone, we are reminded of our continued responsibility to promote these best practices that the 4R program stands for and protect Ohio's waterways."

Over a decade, the 4R Program has achieved notable successes:

- Expansion from the Western Lake Erie Basin to statewide and international recognition, with the establishment of the Global 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Council in 2019.
- Certification of 56 agricultural retailers covering 2.5 million acres, demonstrating the agricultural community's widespread adoption of sustainable practices.
- A reduction in phosphorus application to Ohio fields by 16% compared to 20 years ago, contributing to the ongoing efforts to mitigate algal blooms and protect water quality.

The 4R Program's success is also evidenced by the establishment of the Global 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Council in 2019, further extending the program's reach and impact. Through continued partnerships and progress, including initiatives like the Ohio Agricultural Conservation Initiative and H2Ohio, the program demonstrates a comprehensive and collaborative approach to improving water quality and agricultural sustainability.

The program owes its success to the collaborative efforts of a broad coalition of stakeholders, including agriculture and conservation groups, independent crop consultants, universities, research organizations, NGOs, and government entities. This collaboration has not only fostered trust and mutual understanding but also laid a foundation for future initiatives aimed at preserving Ohio's natural resources.

"As we mark this 10-year milestone, the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program looks forward to another decade of innovation, collaboration and leadership in sustainable agriculture and environmental protection," said Nick Franks, chair of the Ohio Nutrient Stewardship Council.

For more information on the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program and how to become certified, please visit 4Rcertified.org.

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About the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program: Initiated in 2014, the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program is at the forefront of promoting sustainable agriculture through responsible nutrient management. By adhering to the principles of the right fertilizer source, rate, time, and place, the program aims to enhance crop production efficiency while protecting Ohio's waterways from nutrient runoff, thus supporting the well-being of all who live, work, and play in the area.