

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT**

(Ac.)

**CODE 590**

**DEFINITION**

Managing the amount, source, placement, (method of application), and timing of plant nutrients and soil amendments.

**PURPOSE**

- To budget and supply nutrients for plant production.
- To minimize agricultural nonpoint source pollution of surface and ground water resources.
- To properly utilize manure or organic by-products as a plant nutrient source.
- To protect air quality by reducing odors, nitrogen emissions (ammonia, oxides of nitrogen), and the formation of atmospheric particulates.
- To maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies to all lands where plant nutrients and soil amendments are applied. This standard does not apply to one-time nutrient applications to establish perennial crops.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

A nutrient budget for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium must be developed that considers all potential sources of nutrients including, but not limited to, green manures, legumes, crop residues, compost, animal manure, organic by-products, biosolids, waste water, organic matter, soil biological activity, commercial fertilizer, and irrigation water.

Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources (MDAFRR) Chapter 565 Nutrient Management Rules (2) hereafter referred to as "State Rules" will be followed (at minimum) if a farm is required by State Rules to have a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). <http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/01/chaps01.htm> .

Enhanced efficiency fertilizers, used in the State must be defined by the Association of American Plant Food Control Officials (AAPFCO) and be accepted for use by the State fertilizer control official, or similar authority, with responsibility for verification of product guarantees, ingredients (by AAPFCO definition) and label claims.

For nutrient risk assessment policy and procedures see Title 190, General Manual (GM), Part 402, Nutrient Management, and Title 190, National Instruction (NI), Part 302, Nutrient Management Policy Implementation.

To avoid salt damage, the rate and placement of applied nitrogen and potassium in starter fertilizer must be consistent with land-grant university guidelines, or industry practice recognized by the land-grant university.

The Maine Nitrogen Leaching Index must be completed on all sites. Utilize the Index to determine leaching risk, and implement Nitrogen Leaching Best Management Practices in accordance with Conservation Specification Guide Sheet [Leaching Index](#).

The NRCS-approved nutrient risk assessment for phosphorus (Maine Phosphorus Index) must be completed when phosphorus application rates will exceed University of Maine fertility rate guidelines for the planned crop(s) [P Index](#).

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard visit [electronic Field Office Technical Guide](#) Contact Alice Begin, Resource Conservationist at 207-990-9568 or email [alice.begin@me.usda.gov](mailto:alice.begin@me.usda.gov) .

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On organic operations, the nutrient sources and management must be consistent with the USDA's National Organic Program.

Areas contained within minimum application setbacks (e.g., sinkholes, wellheads, gullies, ditches, or surface inlets) must receive nutrients consistent with the setback restrictions.

Applications of irrigation water must minimize the risk of nutrient loss to surface and groundwater.

Soil pH must be maintained in a range that enhances an adequate level for crop nutrient availability and utilization. Refer to State land grant university documentation for guidance.

### **Soil, Manure, and Tissue Sampling and Laboratory Analyses (Testing)**

Nutrient planning must be based on current soil, manure, and (where used as supplemental information) tissue test results developed in accordance with land-grant university guidance, or industry practice, if recognized by the university.

Current soil tests are those that are no older than 3 years, but may be taken on an interval recommended by the University of Maine. The area represented by a soil test must be that acreage recommended by the University.

Where a conservation management unit (CMU) is used as the basis for a sampling unit, all acreage in the CMU must have similar soil type, cropping history, and management practice treatment.

The soil and tissue tests must include analyses pertinent to monitoring or amending the annual nutrient budget, e.g., pH, electrical conductivity (EC) and sodicity where salts are a concern, soil organic matter, phosphorus, potassium, or other nutrients and test for nitrogen where applicable. Follow land-grant university guidelines regarding required analyses.

Standard soil test analyses shall be conducted using the *Modified Morgan* extraction method, and recommendations for nutrient application will comply with University of Maine guidelines.

**If using laboratories other than the University of Maine, it is necessary to make a special request for the Modified Morgan method.**

Soil test analyses must be performed by laboratories successfully meeting the requirements and performance standards of the North American Proficiency Testing Program-Performance Assessment Program (NAPT-PAP) under the auspices of the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) and NRCS, or other NRCS-approved program that considers laboratory performance and proficiency to assure accuracy of soil test results.

<http://www.naptprogram.org/about/participants>. Alternate proficiency testing programs must have solid stakeholder (e.g., water quality control entity, NRCS State staff, growers, and others) support and be regional in scope.

Nutrient values of manure, organic by-products and biosolids must be determined prior to land application.

Manure analyses must include, at minimum, total nitrogen (N), ammonium N, total phosphorus (P) or P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> total potassium (K) or K<sub>2</sub>O and percent solids, or follow land-grant university guidance regarding required analyses.

Manure, organic by-products, and biosolids samples must be collected and analyzed at least annually, or more frequently if needed to account for operational changes (feed management, animal type, manure handling strategy, etc.) impacting manure nutrient concentrations. If no operational changes occur, less frequent manure testing is allowable where operations can document a stable level of nutrient concentrations for the preceding three consecutive years, unless federal, State, or local regulations require more frequent testing.

Samples must be collected, prepared, stored, and shipped, following land-grant university guidance or industry practice.

When planning for new or modified livestock operations, acceptable "book values" recognized by the NRCS (e.g., NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Field Handbook) and the land-grant university, or analyses from similar operations in the geographical area, may be used if they accurately estimate nutrient output from the proposed operations.

Manure testing analyses must be performed by laboratories successfully meeting the requirements and performance standards of the Manure Testing Laboratory Certification Program (MTLCP) under the auspices of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, or other NRCS-approved program that considers laboratory performance and proficiency to assure accurate manure test results. <http://www2.mda.state.mn.us/webapp/lis/manurelabs.jsp>. (The University of Maine Soils Testing Lab will be on the list for 2013).

### **Nutrient Application Rates**

Planned nutrient application rates for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium should not exceed land-grant university guidelines or industry practice when recognized by the university. If rates must exceed recommendations, the Maine Phosphorus Index and the Maine Nitrogen Leaching Index will be followed to determine rates and/or required mitigations.

At a minimum, determination of rate must be based on crop/cropping sequence, current soil test results, realistic yield goals, and NRCS-approved nutrient risk assessments.

If the land-grant university does not provide specific guidance that meets these criteria, application rates must be based on plans that consider realistic yield goals and associated plant nutrient uptake rates.

Realistic yield goals must be established based on historical yield data, soil productivity information, climatic conditions, nutrient test results, level of management, and local research results considering comparable production conditions.

### **Estimates of yield**

Estimates of yield response must consider factors such as poor soil quality, drainage, pH, salinity, etc., prior to assuming that nitrogen and/or phosphorus are deficient.

For new crops or varieties, industry-demonstrated yield, and nutrient utilization information may be used until land-grant university information is available.

Lower-than-recommended nutrient application rates are permissible if the grower's objectives are met.

Applications of biosolids, starter fertilizers, or pop-up fertilizers must be accounted for in the nutrient budget.

### **Nutrient Sources**

Nutrient sources utilized must be compatible with the application timing, tillage and planting system, soil properties, crop, crop rotation, soil organic content, and local climate to minimize risk to the environment.

### **Nutrient Application Timing and Placement**

Manure will not be applied anytime between December 1st and March 15th in accordance with Maine State Nutrient Management Law. In accordance with law, if emergency spreading must be done during the Dec. 1 to March 15 timeframe, *the producer must first receive a written variance from the Maine State Department of Agriculture.*

Timing and placement of all nutrients must correspond as closely as practical with plant nutrient uptake (utilization by crops), and consider nutrient source, cropping system limitations, soil properties, weather conditions, drainage system, soil biology, and nutrient risk assessment results.

Nutrients must not be surface-applied if nutrient losses offsite are likely. This precludes spreading: on frozen and/or snow-covered soils, and/or when the top 2 inches of soil are saturated from rainfall or snow melt.

Exceptions for the above criteria can be made for surface-applied manure when specified conditions are met and adequate conservation measures are installed to prevent the offsite delivery of nutrients.

The adequate treatment level and specified conditions for such applications of manure must be defined by NRCS in concurrence with the water quality control authority in the State. At a minimum, the following site and management factors must be considered:

- slope,
- organic residue and living covers,
- amount and form of nutrients to be applied, and
- adequate setback distances to protect local water quality.

**Additional Criteria to Minimize Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution of Surface and Groundwater**

Planners must use the current NRCS-approved nitrogen, phosphorus, and soil erosion risk assessment tools to assess the risk of nutrient and soil loss. Identified resource concerns must be addressed to meet current planning criteria (quality criteria).

When there is a high risk of transport of nutrients, conservation practices must be coordinated to avoid, control, or trap manure and nutrients before they can leave the field by surface or subsurface drainage (e.g., tile). The number of applications and the application rates must also be considered to limit the transport of nutrients to tile.

Nutrients must be applied with the right placement, in the right amount, at the right time, and from the right source to minimize nutrient losses to surface and groundwater. The following nutrient use efficiency strategies or technologies must be considered:

- slow and controlled release fertilizers
- nitrification and urease inhibitors
- enhanced efficiency fertilizers
- incorporation or injection
- timing and number of applications
- make fall applications of manure only to fields with living cover, such as a perennial sod or a growing, vigorous winter cover crop
- soil nitrate and organic N testing
- coordinate nutrient applications with optimum crop nutrient uptake
- Corn Stalk Nitrate Test (CSNT), Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Test (PSNT), and Pre-Plant Soil Nitrate Test (PPSN)
- tissue testing, chlorophyll meters, and spectral analysis technologies
- other land-grant university recommended technologies that improve nutrient use efficiency and minimize surface or groundwater resource concerns.

**Additional Criteria Applicable to Properly Utilize Manure or Organic By-Products as a Plant Nutrient Source**

See “Nutrient Application Timing and Placement” (General Criteria, above) for spreading restrictions.

Residuals shall be analyzed for content and applied and managed as prescribed by Maine Department of Environmental Protection Chapter 419 Agronomic Use of Residuals (4) and MDAFRR Chapter 565 Nutrient Management Rules (2).

Municipal Shoreland Zoning Ordinances (5) need to be consulted for each affected town to determine locally required setbacks and other requirements for manure spreading and storage relative to great ponds, rivers, wetlands, tidal waters, and certain streams.

Biosolids (sewage sludge) shall be applied in accordance with USEPA regulations. (40 CFR Parts 403 (Pretreatment) and 503 (Biosolids) and DEP Chapter 419 (4).

Residuals such as municipal sludge, septage, fish wastes, woodash, and compost shall be spread in accordance with the separation distances from surface waters, ditches, wetlands, tile inlets, waterways and potable water supplies listed in Maine Department of Environmental Protection Chapter 419 Agronomic Use of Residuals and MDAFRR Chapter 565 Nutrient Management Rules.

Identify sensitive areas adjacent to or near the fields to receive animal manures and locate them on plan maps:

- Wells and other potable water supplies
- Vegetated drainageways or waterways
- Streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, and marine waters
- Property lines

Setbacks for spreading of manure shall be a minimum of 100 feet from drinking wells and non-community water supplies and a minimum of 300 feet from community water supplies. Greater site specific setbacks need to be considered where water supplies are located

downslope from spreading sites. Where high-yielding wells in sand and gravel aquifers exist, setbacks of 1,000 feet are recommended to prevent contamination by nitrates and pathogens.

A database of public water supplies (community and non-community) is maintained as part of the Maine Drinking Water program administered by Health Engineering, a division within the Maine Department of Human Services, Bureau of Health. A list of wells can be found at

[:http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/eng/water/sources.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/eng/water/sources.htm), and maps at: [http://www.maine.gov/dep/gis/datamaps/DWP\\_Wells/index.html](http://www.maine.gov/dep/gis/datamaps/DWP_Wells/index.html).

For NRCS employees, location of public wells can be found in the Customer Service Toolkit GIS Templates in the following layer group: Program Ranking Layers>Maine Drinking Water Program>Public Well Intakes.

Site specific setbacks or buffers will be identified and prescribed to protect sensitive areas other than drinking wells from potential pollution from animal manure applications. In lieu of using site specific setbacks or buffers to protect sensitive areas, the following setbacks will be used:

- 25 feet from any waterway (drainageway) or property line.
- 100 feet from all surface waters including streams, springs, ponds, lakes, and marine waters.

The locations of sensitive areas and the setbacks or buffers to protect them shall be discussed with the producer during the development of the plan.

A total single application of liquid manure:

- must not exceed the soil's infiltration or water holding capacity
- be based on crop rooting depth
- must be adjusted to avoid runoff or loss to subsurface tile drains.

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- must not exceed the soil's infiltration or water holding capacity

- be based on crop rooting depth
- must be adjusted to avoid runoff or loss to subsurface tile drains.

Crop production activities and nutrient use efficiency technologies must be coordinated to take advantage of mineralized plant-available nitrogen to minimize the potential for nitrogen losses due to denitrification or ammonia volatilization.

### **Nitrogen and phosphorus application rates**

Nitrogen and phosphorus application rates must be planned based on risk assessment results as determined by NRCS-approved nitrogen and phosphorus risk assessment tools.

For fields receiving manure, where phosphorus risk assessment results equate to LOW risk, additional phosphorus and potassium can be applied at rates greater than crop requirement, not to exceed the nitrogen requirement for the succeeding crop.

For fields receiving manure, where phosphorus risk assessment results equate to MODERATE risk, additional phosphorus and potassium may be applied at a phosphorus crop requirement rate for the planned crops in the rotation.

When phosphorus risk assessment results equate to HIGH risk, additional phosphorus and potassium may be applied at phosphorus crop removal rates if the following requirements are met:

- a soil phosphorus drawdown strategy has been implemented, and
- a site assessment for nutrients and soil loss has been conducted to determine if mitigation practices are required to protect water quality.
- any deviation from these high risk requirements must have the approval of the Chief of the NRCS.

Manure or organic by-products may be applied on legumes at rates equal to the estimated removal of nitrogen in harvested plant biomass, not to exceed land grant university recommendations.

Manure may be applied at a rate equal to the recommended phosphorus application, or

estimated phosphorus removal in harvested plant biomass for the crop rotation, or multiple years in the crop sequence at one time. When such applications are made, the application rate must not exceed the acceptable phosphorus risk assessment criteria, must not exceed the recommended nitrogen application rate during the year of application or harvest cycle, and no additional phosphorus must be applied in the current year and any additional years for which the single application of phosphorus is supplying nutrients.

**Additional Criteria to Protect Air Quality by Reducing Odors, Nitrogen Emissions and the Formation of Atmospheric Particulates**

If the NMP is required to meet State Rules, it must include best management practices (BMP's) or other provisions for effective odor and insect control associated with manure storage and application.

To address air quality concerns caused by odor, nitrogen, sulfur, and/or particulate emissions; the source, timing, amount, and placement of nutrients must be adjusted to minimize the negative impact of these emissions on the environment and human health. One or more of the following may be used:

- slow or controlled release fertilizers
- nitrification inhibitors
- urease inhibitors
- nutrient enhancement technologies
- incorporation
- injection
- stabilized nitrogen fertilizers
- residue and tillage management
- no-till or strip-till
- other technologies that minimize the impact of these emissions

Do not apply poultry litter, manure, or organic by-products of similar dryness/density when there is a high probability that wind will blow the material offsite.

**Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain the Physical, Chemical, and Biological**

**Condition of the Soil to Enhance Soil Quality for Crop Production and Environmental Protection**

Time the application of nutrients to avoid periods when field activities will result in soil compaction.

Monitor soil pH and apply lime, dolomitic (magnesium) lime, or other liming agent in accordance with soils test recommendations to maintain appropriate pH for nutrient availability by planned crops.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

*Elevated soil test phosphorus levels are detrimental to soil biota (and therefore, soil health) as well as the environment.*

Use no-till/strip-till in combination with cover crops to sequester nutrients, increase soil organic matter, increase aggregate stability, reduce compaction, improve infiltration, and enhance soil biological activity to improve nutrient use efficiency.

Use nutrient management strategies such as cover crops, crop rotations, and crop rotations with perennials to improve nutrient cycling and reduce energy inputs.

Note that some herbicides used for cover crop kill may have a negative effect on mineral uptake by plants. To avoid this effect, consider using mechanical means to kill cover, harvest winter annuals for forage prior to spring planting, or choose cover crops that winter-kill.

Use variable-rate nitrogen application based on expected crop yields, soil variability, soil nitrate or organic N supply levels, or chlorophyll concentration.

Use variable-rate nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium application rates based on site-specific variability in crop yield, soil characteristics, soil test values, and other soil productivity factors.

Develop site-specific yield maps using a yield monitoring system. Use the data to further diagnose low- and high- yield areas, or zones, and make the necessary management changes. See Title 190, Agronomy Technical Note (TN) 190.AGR.3, Precision Nutrient Management Planning.

Use manure management conservation practices to manage manure nutrients to limit losses prior to nutrient utilization.

Apply manure at a rate that will result in an “improving” Soil Conditioning Index (SCI). Do not exceed acceptable risk of nitrogen or phosphorus loss.

Use legume crops and cover crops to provide nitrogen through biological fixation and nutrient recycling.

Work with a nutritionist to modify animal diets to reduce the nutrient content of manure.

Soil test information should be no older than 1 year when developing new plans.

Excessive levels of some nutrients can cause induced deficiencies of other nutrients, e.g., high soil test phosphorus levels can result in zinc deficiency in corn.

Use soil tests, plant tissue analyses, and field observations to check for secondary plant nutrient deficiencies or toxicity that may impact plant growth or availability of the primary nutrients.

Use the adaptive nutrient management learning process to improve nutrient use efficiency on farms as outlined in the NRCS’ National Nutrient Policy in GM 190, Part 402, Nutrient Management.

Potassium should not be applied in situations where an excess (greater than soil test potassium recommendation) causes nutrient imbalances in crops or forages. Crops high in potassium can be dangerous to livestock that will be giving birth.

Workers should be protected from and avoid unnecessary contact with plant nutrient sources. Extra caution must be taken when handling anhydrous ammonia or when dealing with organic wastes stored in unventilated enclosures.

Material generated from cleaning nutrient application equipment should be utilized in an environmentally safe manner. Excess material should be collected and stored or field applied in an appropriate manner.

Nutrient containers should be recycled in compliance with State and local guidelines or regulations.

### **Considerations to Minimize Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution of Surface and Groundwater**

Use conservation practices that slow runoff, reduce erosion, and increase infiltration, such as conservation tillage, cover crops, filter strips, contour farming, or contour buffer strips. These practices can also reduce the loss of nitrates or soluble phosphorus.

Use application methods and timing strategies that reduce the risk of nutrient transport by ground and surface waters, such as:

- split applications of nitrogen to deliver nutrients during periods of maximum crop utilization,
- banded applications of nitrogen and/or phosphorus to improve nutrient availability,
- drainage water management to reduce nutrient discharge through drainage systems, and
- incorporation of surface-applied manures or organic by-products if precipitation capable of producing runoff or erosion is forecast within the time of planned application.

Use the Agrichemical Handling Facility (code 309) conservation practice to protect air, soil, and water quality.

### **Considerations to Protect Air Quality by Reducing Nitrogen and/or Particulate Emissions to the Atmosphere**

Avoid applying manure and other by-products upwind of inhabited areas.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

The following components must be included in the nutrient management plan:

- aerial site photograph(s)/imagery or site map(s), and a soil survey map of the site,
- soil information including: soil type surface texture, pH, drainage class, permeability, available water capacity, depth to water table, restrictive features, and flooding and/or ponding frequency,

- location of designated sensitive areas and the associated nutrient application restrictions and setbacks,
- for manure applications, location of nearby residences, or other locations where humans may be present on a regular basis, and any identified meteorological (e.g., prevailing winds at different times of the year), or topographical influences that may affect the transport of odors to those locations,
- results of approved risk assessment tools for nitrogen, phosphorus, and erosion losses (P Index, Leaching Index, and RUSLE2),
- documentation establishing that the application site presents low risk for phosphorus transport to local water when phosphorus is applied in excess of crop requirement,
- current and/or planned plant production sequence or crop rotation,
- soil, water, compost, manure, organic by-product, and plant tissue sample analyses applicable to the plan,
- when soil phosphorus levels are increasing, include a discussion of the risk associated with phosphorus accumulation and a proposed phosphorus draw-down strategy,
- realistic yield goals for the crops,
- complete nutrient budget for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium for the plant production sequence or crop rotation,
- listing and quantification of all nutrient sources and form,
- all enhanced efficiency fertilizer products that are planned for use,
- in accordance with the Leaching Index for Nitrogen and the Phosphorus Index, specify the recommended nutrient application source, timing, amount (except for precision/variable rate applications specify method used to determine rate), and placement of

plant nutrients for each field or management unit, and

- guidance for implementation, operation and maintenance, and recordkeeping.

Provide application records per management zone or as applied map within individual field boundaries (or electronic records) documenting source, timing, method, and rate of all applications that resulted from use of the precision agriculture process for nutrient or soil amendment applications.

Maintain the electronic records of the GIS data layers and nutrient applications for at least 5 years.

If increases in soil phosphorus levels are expected (i.e., when N-based rates are used), the nutrient management plan must document:

- the soil phosphorus levels at which it is desirable to convert to phosphorus based planning,
- the potential plan for soil test phosphorus drawdown from the production and harvesting of crops, ([http://www.sera17.ext.vt.edu/Documents/BMP\\_vegetative\\_mining.pdf](http://www.sera17.ext.vt.edu/Documents/BMP_vegetative_mining.pdf)), and
- management activities or techniques used to reduce the potential for phosphorus transport and loss,
- for AFOs, a quantification of manure produced in excess of crop nutrient requirements, and
- a long-term strategy and proposed implementation timeline for reducing soil P to levels that protect water quality.

In addition, the following components must be included in a *precision/variable rate* nutrient management plan:

- Document the geo-referenced field boundary and data collected that was processed and analyzed as a GIS layer or layers to generate nutrient or soil amendment recommendations.
- Document the nutrient recommendation guidance and recommendation equations

used to convert the GIS base data layer or layers to a nutrient source material recommendation GIS layer or layers.

- Document if a variable rate nutrient or soil amendment application was made.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Conduct periodic plan reviews to determine if adjustments or modifications to the plan are needed. At a minimum, plans must be reviewed and revised, as needed with each soil test cycle (generally one to three years), changes in manure volume or analysis, crops, or crop management.

Fields receiving animal manures and/or biosolids must be monitored for the accumulation of heavy metals and phosphorus in accordance with land- grant university guidance and State law.

Significant changes in animal numbers, management, and feed management will necessitate additional manure analyses to establish a revised average nutrient content.

Calibrate application equipment to ensure accurate distribution of material at planned rates.

Document the nutrient application rate. When the applied rate differs from the planned rate, provide appropriate documentation for the change.

Records must be created and maintained for at least 5 years to document plan implementation and maintenance. As applicable, records include:

- soil, plant tissue, water, manure, and organic by product analyses resulting in recommendations for nutrient application,
- quantities, analyses and sources of nutrients applied,
- dates, and method(s) of nutrient applications, source of nutrients, and rates of application,
- weather conditions and soil moisture at the time of application; lapsed time to manure incorporation; rainfall or irrigation event,
- crops planted, planting and harvest dates, yields, nutrient analyses of harvested biomass, and crop residues removed,
- dates of plan review, name of reviewer, and recommended changes resulting from the review, and
- all enhanced efficiency fertilizer products used.

Additional records for *precision/variable rate* sites must include:

- maps identifying the variable application source, timing, amount, and placement of all plant nutrients applied, and
- GPS-based yield maps for crops where yields can be digitally collected.