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Economics of Water Quality Protection from Nonpoint Sources: Theory and Practice

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Abstract

Water quality is a major environmental issue. Pollution from nonpoint sources is the single largest remaining source of water quality impairments in the United States. Agriculture is a major source of several nonpoint-source pollutants, including nutrients, sediment, pesticides, and salts. Agricultural nonpoint pollution reduction policies can be designed to induce producers to change their production practices in ways that improve the environmental and related economic consequences of production. The information necessary to design economically efficient pollution control policies is almost always lacking. Instead, policies can be designed to achieve specific environmental or other similarly related goals at least cost, given transaction costs and any other political, legal, or informational constraints that may exist. This report outlines the economic characteristics of five instruments that can be used to reduce agricultural nonpoint source pollution (economic incentives, standards, education, liability, and research) and discusses empirical research related to the use of these instruments.

Details

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