

In Balance

A Newsletter for the Whatcom County Dairy Industry



Sign Up Continues for 2003 EQIP: Reducing Soil Loss in Forest Areas a Likely Target for Future Funds

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program's (EQIP) priorities and eligibility rules for 2003 are still being discussed and should be finalized by the time the federal fiscal year begins in October. As of early September 2002, over 60 producers have signed up for 2003 EQIP funds. For the last six years EQIP funds have been focused on improving water quality in lowland areas of northwest Washington where livestock farming is concentrated. Clearly, practices funded by EQIP in the past have helped to improve surface water quality. In fact, water quality in agricultural areas has improved enough that a new priority for EQIP funds may emerge: the reduction of soil erosion from abandoned roads and undersized culverts in forestlands. If forestland erosion control becomes a priority, then it will likely be a good news/bad news situation for agriculture. The good news is that more funds will be available to improve environmental quality. The bad news is that, at a minimum, agriculture may begin sharing EQIP funds with forestry.



A manure separator is an example of a practice eligible for EQIP funds.

Volume 1, Issue 4
Fall 2002

Whatcom
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The Smell of Tax Relief:

The next time a neighbor calls to complain about manure odor you might explain that you are doing them a potential favor in the form of reducing their property taxes. Here's how it works: Tell your neighbor to prove to the county assessor that odors have diminished their property values. In Nebraska it is becoming more common thanks to the state's Sierra Club. The group is holding "property-tax protest workshops", promoting them as a way to obtain a 30% reduction in property taxes. (From Dairy Alert, Vol. 2, Issue 23, 6/5/2002).

Tansy Ragwort a Threat to Livestock on Local Farms

Sometimes the greatest danger to livestock is not what comes from outside the farm, but from what grows within it. If cattle and other livestock consume a weed called tansy ragwort, the weed's powerful toxins will cause permanent liver damage and even death. The most likely place for tansy ragwort to show up is in low maintenance areas that don't get clipped or mowed regularly. These are often areas such as heifer pastures (especially ones that are lightly wooded), fence lines, ditch banks, and manure pond dikes.



Tansy ragwort is toxic to livestock, causing irreversible liver damage. It should be removed from fields before it seeds out.

Tansy ragwort starts blooming in July and continues through September. Tansy ragwort seed heads spread their mischief via tiny, air borne seeds that can drift for miles. If tansy is found this time of year, it should be dug up and disposed of in a manner, such as burning, that will prevent further seed dispersal. Areas where tansy ragwort is found should be rechecked for an extended period because its seed may survive for up to 15 years in the soil.

In addition to mechanical removal, several herbicides can halt tansy's regrowth. Agrochemical suppliers should be consulted to determine the most suitable material for controlling tansy during its various stages of growth. Biological controls also exist - the cinnabar moth, the ragwort flea beetle and the ragwort seed head fly all eat tansy ragwort. For more information about controlling tansy ragwort, refer to Extension Bulletin PNW 175, Tansy Ragwort, and Bulletin 716, Tansy Ragwort Biology and Eradication, University of Idaho.

Why Take a Fall Soil Nitrate Test?

Dan Sullivan, a soil scientist at Oregon State University, wrote the original GUIDE TO "REPORT CARD" SOIL TESTING in 1994 when he was working at Washington State University's (WSU) Research Center in Puyallup. Also known as Technical Note 35, this guide outlined the rationale and procedure for taking fall soil nitrate tests in high rainfall areas of Oregon and Washington. Sullivan and Craig Cogger (WSU, Puyallup) are currently revising this guide and anticipate publishing it early next year. The first four items in the following list are some of the principal reasons cited by Sullivan for taking fall soil nitrate tests. The last item listed was provided by local planners engaged in writing nutrient management plans and reviewing nutrient records:

1. Get a general idea of balance between N supply from manure and other sources and crop N demand.
2. Identify imbalances in N supply among fields.
3. Identify fields that may respond to changes in timing or amount of manure application or other agronomic practices.
4. Get an early warning of potential threats to groundwater. Sullivan states that it is important to realize that concentrations of post-harvest soil nitrate-N are not equivalent to annual N leaching amounts.
5. Identify whether nutrient application rates specified in nutrient management plans (the estimated agronomic rate) are sufficient to meet crop requirements for near maximum yield without leaving unacceptable accumulations of post-harvest nitrate.

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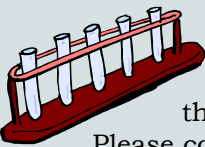
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October 15th Deadline Set for Taking Fall Soil Nitrate Tests

Fall soil nitrate testing plays an essential role in managing nutrients in Western Washington (see related article *Why Fall Soil Nitrate Test?* in this issue). Testing guidelines have always recommended that sampling occur between August 15th and October 15th because heavy fall rain leaches nitrate from the top of the soil profile. This year that recommendation becomes a requirement. Producers contracted to do Nutrient Management (NRCS Specification 590) are required to complete this test by October 15th to receive credit for completing this practice. Fall soil nitrate tests from the top one-foot of the soil profile need to be taken on every field specified in the farm plan. Please contact Conservation District or NRCS staff if you have questions regarding this requirement.



Let Measurement Be the Guide to Nutrient Management Decisions

Measurement can occur without management, but effective management cannot occur without measurement. Three distinct types of measurement are necessary to manage nutrients agronomically:

1. Measurement of nutrients in manure
2. Measurement of the amount of manure applied
3. Measurement of nutrients in the soil

A fourth measurement that comes highly recommended is the measurement of nutrients removed in harvested crops. By putting the information gleaned from these measurements together, the farm operator is prepared to make an informed decision about how much manure to apply to meet crop requirements over the course of the growing season. Neglect even one of the measurements and the result can be little more than guessing.



10 Ways to Make Your Farm ENVIROSECURE



Lately dairy producers are devoting more attention to biosecurity management. To prevent the spread of diseases from herd to herd, producers have begun posting signs barring farm visitors from entering buildings where cattle are maintained. Johne's is one disease of particular concern and it has been just two years since hoof and mouth disease devastated the United Kingdom. So producers desire for biosecurity is understandable.

But what about envirosecurity? Envirosecurity ensures that farmers are not only helping themselves, but are also helping provide all of us with our best hope for a more environmentally secure future. The following 10 items are signs of envirosecurity:

1. Two-inch pressure relief valves installed on underground manure pipeline risers so gas build up in pipes can be safely vented between application. Also, warning signs posted at risers notifying the unsuspecting about the potential hazard.
2. Waste storage ponds with at least one-foot of freeboard and a secure fence around their perimeter. Also, warning signs posted cautioning farm visitors to keep out.
3. A land base and waste collection and storage facilities that keep pace with herd expansion.
4. Up-to-date nutrient application records.
5. Periodic tests of nitrate-nitrogen levels in feed and well water.
6. Farms that treat field areas bordering ditches and streams as Farm With Caution Zones. A light yellow color in leaves of plants growing close to a ditch provides a good sign of envirosecurity.
7. A farm with a land base for applying nutrients that is not pushed to the theoretical limit.
8. A working relationship with custom manure applicators that communicates your concern about having nutrients applied in an environmentally safe and agronomically appropriate manner.
9. A working relationship with public and/or private nutrient management consultants.
10. Grass filter strips (3 inch minimum vegetation height) protecting ditches bordering dry cow and heifer lots and outside loafing areas. The grass filter strips should measure at least half the lot width.



For safe operation of manure transfer pipelines - this diagram shows a riser cap with a 2" dia. brass ball valve for releasing pressure buildup in the pipeline during unused periods.