

In Balance

A Newsletter for the Whatcom County Dairy Industry



EPA Issues New Permit Rules for Dairies - Other livestock facilities also to come under scrutiny

On December 15, 2002 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced changes in how dairies and other livestock operations will be regulated. These regulations are generally referred to as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Requirements. Some of the rule changes that Whatcom County producers can expect to hear more about during the coming year include:

- Dairies with more than 700 cows will be designated as "Large CAFOs" and will need to get a permit, even if they have never violated water quality laws.
- Operations other than dairies that maintain livestock, such as dairy replacement operations and poultry farms, will be inspected for water quality violations and regulated if discharges are confirmed.
- New rules for farms under permit will include soil phosphorous testing at least once every five years and the testing of manure that is transferred off farm so that those receiving it will know what its nutrient content is.

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Whatcom
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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T-SUM 200 - Use Accumulated Heat Units to Time First Manure Application

Dairy producers can normally expect favorable conditions to begin applying liquid manure by sometime next month in many locations. The main exceptions are fields that are poorly drained and/or prone to frequent flooding. The accumulation of 200 heat units (T-Sum 200) since January 1, 2003, signals the best time to begin applying manure. Since 1995, Conservation District staff have been determining T-Sum 200's arrival locally, based on weather data maintained at the sewage treatment facility in Lynden. Contact District dairy technicians (Chris Clark, Mark Ockey, or Chuck Timblin) starting in February to find out if it has arrived, or consult Ag Canada's website for conditions in Abbotsford (farmwest.com).

Whatcom County Not Only Area Where Dairies Face Regulatory Challenges

The claim is made that dairy producers in Whatcom County are held to a higher regulatory standard than producers in other parts of the country. Few other areas have a Manure Ordinance that prohibits post-harvest manure applications on corn ground or have personnel from several regulatory agencies keeping tabs on whether local farms are complying with environmental regulations.

Yet dairy producers in other areas also face regulatory challenges. Consider California's Tulare County, which is the biggest dairy county in the nation. According to an article in *The Sacramento Bee*, nearly 100 dairies are currently waiting for building permits due to environmental concerns. One producer who just received a permit said he spent more than \$500,000 on lawyers and environmental studies to keep the project afloat. By contrast, Whatcom County promptly issues building permits to producers intent upon expansion. Additionally, Whatcom County producers rarely have to deal with concerns about air quality, while in California and elsewhere (Idaho, Eastern Washington) air quality is a significant issue.

Just as Whatcom County producers have had to learn to adapt to challenges of a wet environment, (see "Regulatory challenges" continued on page 2)

DAF Prototype Tested in Whatcom County

DAF or "Dissolved Air Flotation," is the name of a manure solids/manure nutrient removal system designed by Krofta Technologies Corp. The DAF system is currently being tested on farms throughout the western U.S., including the Ken Maarhuis and Edaleen dairies in Whatcom County. DAF is designed to take liquid manure that has already gone through a solids separator and further remove both solids and nutrients, thereby producing a 'cleaner' liquid. Preliminary tests indicate that the effluent may contain significantly fewer nutrients and solids than the manure going into the machine. DAF uses a combination of dissolved oxygen and chemical additive action in order to accomplish its task. Its purveyors hope to keep the cost of the chemical additive down to around 10 cents per cow, per day. Unfortunately, there are no firm estimates available yet on the cost of equipment and installation.



DAF in action at the Ken Maarhuis Dairy.

It is possible that DAF could become a valuable tool for nutrient management. Potential uses for DAF include cleaning up flush water so that it could be recycled over and over again for longer periods of time and concentrating manure nutrients in solid form for easier storage. For now, DAF is in the prototype and research and development phase. Much study still needs to be done to determine its true effectiveness, as well as its potential effects on the environment.

DEADLINES APPROACHING!!

2003 Cost-share (EQIP) Sign-up Deadline - Thursday, February 14, 2003. Sign up at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service field office located in the Agricultural Service Center at 6975 Hannegan Road, Lynden.

Certification Deadline for Dairy Nutrient Management Plan (DNMP): Under Washington State law, the deadline for DNMP certification is December 31, 2003.

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UPCOMING LOCAL EVENTS!



Understanding Your Nutrient Management Plan and Managing Nitrogen for Profit and Stewardship - Wednesday, January 30, 2003 9AM - 3PM at Homestead Golf Resort in Lynden.

The workshop will take you step-by-step through a real Nutrient Management Plan and highlight sampling, testing calibration, and record keeping in order to assist the producer with making his or her nutrient management plan a management tool. Presentations will be made on the nitrogen cycle and whole farm nutrient management as affected by nutrition.

Registration: No fee. Lunch will be provided at no cost to the first 100 who register.

Certified Crop Advisor Credits: awarded to participants

Contact: Chris Clark (360) 354-2035 ext. 124; cclark@whatcomcd.org

Whatcom Conservation District Board of Supervisor Election - Monday, March 10, 2003 at Ag Service Center 9AM - 7 PM. Find out how you can get involved in directing natural resource conservation programs by becoming a member of WCD Board. Two out of 5 positions will open at the end of March 2003. One is an appointed position (by the State Conservation Commission) and the other is elected. Find out more by contacting the District office.

Conservation District Annual Plant Sale: Saturday, March 8, 2003. Pre-orders for this year's sale will only be accepted for orders totaling \$100 minimum. Other orders will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis on the day of the sale. Contact the District for list of available plant species.



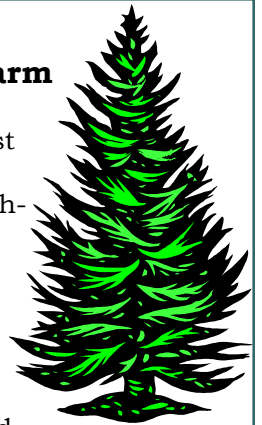
According to a recent study by Ag-Canada, a well established relay crop can take up 53 pounds per acre of residual soil nitrate after corn is off, which is twice as much nitrogen as a fall seeded winter rye cover crop removes. This picture was taken at the Roger Blok Dairy.

Regulatory Challenges (continued from page 1)

producers in other areas will have to learn how to deal with geographical locations that make their areas prone to poor air quality. Degraded air quality may prove to be a more difficult challenge to overcome than our wet environment, because of the harm poor air quality poses to a large number of people. Environmental groups in California contend that 72,000 asthma attacks and hundreds of deaths occur each year from an air basin that is one of the dirtiest in the nation. Dairies are still exempt from federal air regulations in California, but because farms with 4,000 or more cows produce 25 tons of smog-contributing gases annually, environmental groups feel they should come under the same regulations that cover industries with similar emission levels.

Benefits Abound for Planting Trees Around the Farm

Start planning now, because the best time to plant trees and shrubs in Whatcom County is rapidly approaching (mid-February through early April)! Seedling plants, which are available at a fraction of the cost of those grown in containers, are only available in the early spring, and getting them planted early helps ensure that they will get off to a good start. These are some reasons to consider planting trees:



- Windbreaks and shelter-belts for livestock** - Even a single row of trees will take some of the chill out of winter wind (though 2 or 3 rows is even better). Trees are also useful for minimizing and/or controlling drifting snow around the farmstead.
- Privacy and noise reduction** - A row of trees may be the best way to keep inquiring minds from wondering about things that are none of their business.
- Odor control** - A row of trees accelerates the dispersion of odor by causing air to swirl and lift away from the ground.
- Beautification** - Trees add beauty (and value) to the landscape and can be used to screen out less than pleasing sights.
- Wildlife habitat** - Once trees are established you won't have to buy birdseed to entice songbirds to your farm.