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Ecology edges toward regulating manure lagoons

Agency revamping terms of its CAFO permits

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Ecology tentatively moved Tuesday to regulate hundreds of dairies and other livestock operations that have manure lagoons.

Ecology officials say they're trying to keep livestock waste from seeping into groundwater, fulfilling their mandate to enforce federal and state pollution laws.

An environmental group's director said the move is overdue, while livestock industry representatives warned the proposal could lead to costly rules that hinder producers.

DOE is rewriting the rules for confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs. Currently, only 10 operations, such as feedlots, in Washington state are required to have CAFO permits. The permits set out what producers must do to keep manure from washing into surface water, regulating the size, design and maintenance of lagoons.

Under the new proposal, which Ecology officials described as a "preliminary draft," the department turns its attention to groundwater, as well.

DOE assumes lagoons leak manure into groundwater, so any producer with a lagoon will need a CAFO permit. Plus, the producer will have to test fields on which manure is spread. Soil samples down to 3 feet deep will have to be taken. The higher the contaminant level, the stronger the action the producer will have to take to clean up the ground.

Lagoons lined with two layers of synthetic material, with a leak-detection system between the layers, will be exempt from the CAFO permit requirements.

Jay Gordon, governmental relations director of the Washington State Dairy Federation, said most of the state's 400-plus dairies have manure lagoons, but he didn't know of one lagoon that's double-lined. "It's unbelievably expensive," he said.

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Exporters buying less hay this season

Situation worsened by devaluation of China yuan

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ELLENSBURG, Wash. — West Coast hay exporters are buying significantly less hay this year because of a buildup of inventory remaining from last winter's port slowdown.

Business is bad and about to get a whole lot worse be-

cause China devalued its currency, said Jeff Calaway, president of Calaway Trading Inc., a major hay exporter based in Ellensburg, Wash.

Currencies in Asia tumbled and stock markets worldwide fell Aug. 11 after China's central bank devalued the yuan.

U.S. hay exporters and their customers in China, Ja-

pan and the Middle East are losing money on 2014 crop hay contracts they have to complete, Calaway said.

"We're losing our shirts and they are. No one is making money. Now the future of commodity prices looks very challenging because China just devalued the yuan.

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Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Swathers work on third-cutting alfalfa between Quincy and George, Wash., on July 31. Exporters have been buying less hay this year as they deal with stockpiles built up from last winter's port slowdown.

A DIFFERENT DROUGHT



Steve Elde, a Skagit County, Wash., farm manager and irrigation district commissioner, clears sticks from a pump that draws from the north fork of the Skagit River for two 6-hour intervals each day.

Prolonged hot, dry weather impacts all of Washington's farmers

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

CONWAY, Wash. — Irrigation district commissioner Steve Elde is losing sleep over this year's historic drought.

Several times a day — or night — the responsibility often falls to Elde to go to the Skagit River to tend the pump that serves as a lifeline to the district's farmers.

"It's a weird schedule, but it's the only option we have," he said.

Elde's northwestern Washington district has a pump just upstream from where the river empties into Puget Sound. The pump provides much-needed water to the area's farmers, whose verdant fields would otherwise be parched by this year's drought. The region has received just 1.68 inches of rain since May 1 — 29 percent of normal.

Because the river is running low, and to leave more water for fish, the Skagit Valley's Drainage and Irrigation District 15 can run the pump only three hours before and after the twice-daily high tides. That means an around-the-clock schedule for Elde and those tending the pump.

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Photos by Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Water from the Skagit River pours into a ditch to irrigate crops in northwest Washington. A pump drawing the water must be shut off 12 hours a day.

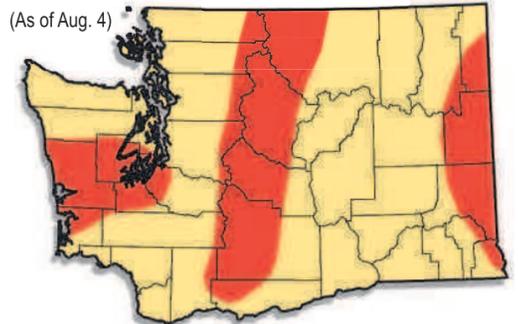


Cranberries ripen in the sun on the Long Beach Peninsula in southwest Washington. The berries illustrate the complexities of forecasting the drought's economic impact on agriculture.

Washington drought conditions

Intensity

- D0-Abnormally dry
- D1-Drought (moderate)
- D2-Drought (severe)
- D3-Drought (extreme)
- D4-Drought (exceptional)



Intensity of drought by percent area affected

Date	None	D0-4	D1-4	D2-4	D3-4	D4
Current	0%	100	100	100	31.7	0
3 mo. ago	32.5	67.5	51.8	15.5	0	0
1 yr. ago	39.2	60.8	40.8	20	0	0

Source: National Drought Mitigation Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Capital Press graphic

"As a lifelong Washington resident, I don't think I've ever prayed for rain."

Tom Buroker, the state Department of Ecology's Northwest Region director

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