

Manure management rules adopted

Largest 160 livestock farms will be affected

MADISON – Changes to regulations governing manure management on Wisconsin’s 160 largest farms that go into effect this spring are expected to help safeguard drinking water, protect good fishing and level the playing field for large livestock operations, state water quality officials say.

The changes, which were adopted by the state Natural Resources Board in January 2007, cleared their last round of legislative review last week, allowing them to go into effect in May. The changes update Department of Natural Resources water quality protection requirements for large livestock farms so they reflect federal requirements and, in particular, seek to decrease winter manure runoff that has contaminated wells, killed fish and polluted streams in past years.

“We’re gratified that these important rules are now on the books and that lawmakers, farmers, environmentalists, and other citizens joined with us to get a rule that works for Wisconsin livestock operations and protects our valuable water resources,” says DNR Secretary Scott Hassett.

While the revisions to Natural Resources Chapter 243 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code pertain to only one-half of 1 percent of Wisconsin’s 30,000 livestock farms, those farms account for 11 percent of the animals on farms in the state. These large farms are already required to get a state water quality protection permit because they have at least 1,000 animal units, which classifies them as a pollution point source facility needing a Federal Clean Water Act permit. One thousand animal units equals 700 milking cows, 1,000 beef steers or 55,000 turkeys.

“The changes to NR 243 will also help ensure more consistent regulation of large-scale operations and more clearly define what is expected from operations that need DNR water protection permits,” says Gordon Stevenson, who leads DNR’s runoff management section.

Many of these large farms, referred to as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations or CAFOs, already follow some of the practices called for by the rule changes; 90 percent already have the capacity to store liquid manure for six months. Getting the rules in place assures all large farms have enough storage capacity and follow best management practices to help protect against manure running into groundwater, lakes and rivers. The sheer volume of manure these farms manage – each produces at least as much organic pollution as a city of 18,000 people – greatly increases the potential that improperly handled manure could cause water quality problems.

Another key provision affecting CAFOs prohibits spreading liquid manure on frozen or snow-covered ground unless it’s injected or immediately incorporated into the soil. Solid manure spreading is prohibited on frozen or snow-covered ground during February and March unless immediately incorporated.

The rule changes were developed by DNR with an advisory committee and originally approved by the Natural Resources Board in May 2006. Review and input by the Assembly and Senate agriculture committees led to some changes that were ultimately crafted with input from the agriculture and environmental communities. Working together, these groups identified where changes could be made without compromising water quality protection.

“The bottom line is that we all want clean water and we need a thriving agricultural industry in this state,” says Russ Rasmussen, director of the DNR Bureau of Watershed Management. “The revisions to NR 243 are an important step in achieving these goals.”

More information on the rule changes is available on the [Animal Feeding Operation Rule Revisions](#) pages of the DNR Web site.

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