



Input on Lower Yakima Valley Nitrate Study

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The Obama Administration kills another industry. The coal industry is close to death because of EPA, and now they are working on another productive and needed industry. The EPA released a report on September 27th that could kill the Dairy industry in the Yakima Valley and ultimately the entire United States. This 307 page report points the finger at all water quality problems in the Yakima Valley being caused by dairies without any specific point of origin to the contamination. This report shows high nitrate levels in 7 shallow wells close to dairies (tested 30 wells), the water wells on the dairies themselves show very low to no nitrate counts. How does this happen? The report states these down gradient shallow well nitrates could be from chemicals or animals..... Animals -which also include humans.....? None of the tested well locations had their own septic systems tested by the EPA within the report. Instead EPA chose to use tests from the Waste Water treatment plants at the cities of Mabton, Zillah, and Toppenish to show a base line for human wastes. The EPA in the small print admits that their tests could not discern which Animal (including humans) was the source of the nitrates. Their own footnotes on their website show that they mishandled samples, and that they had to make a lot of assumptions to point the finger at the dairies....The report, even to a non-scientist, is full of flaws. It should be noted that since high nitrates have been found in the area, Yakima County received a grant facilitating de-nitrating water from shallow wells in area homes over the last couple of years providing free testing of well water, and free de-nitration units. They got very few takers. Either people were too lazy to go get their water tested or they don't care. But now EPA says this is a CRISIS and has to be dealt with immediately. There has been no data reported to Yakima County Health Dept. that the area has any higher blue baby incidences than the populations as a whole. The EPA takes two plus years to publish the report, but gives the 6 dairy families named in the report 2 weeks to read it, and sign their livelihoods away. They were not allowed to question data, respond with their own data, or get interpretations of the information by experts. On top of that, EPA presented each of the dairymen a multi-page contract that these dairies must sign and comply with for the next 5 to 40 + years that includes unrestricted access by the EPA on their places and requires spending millions of dollars on site improvements that have no guarantee to bring the nitrate levels down in any well. And they can keep demanding more compliance as time goes on. The

dairymen do not want to sign their own death warrant and open themselves up to having an open checkbook to the EPA demands. (Unlike the government they have to earn enough money to pay the bills). The EPA offers no loans to these dairies to offset this financial burden. The contract says that if they do not comply within the EPA's arbitrary and undefined timeframes, they will be fined daily for not complying. The whole premise is that the dairies are guilty and were guilty before the report was ever written.

At least one of the dairy families involved could be forced out of business in the near future due to the burdensome costs associated with compliance, or the costs to prove themselves not guilty. They can not afford to upgrade a place they do not own. With the volatility of milk prices the last 5 years, they can lose millions of dollars just feeding their animals yet alone put millions of dollars into improvements that may not bring about changes in nitrate levels. This closure means at least 15 year around jobs will be lost in our Lower Yakima Valley.

Some of these dairies have been in existence for over 50 years and have gone through several ownerships. Whose cows/septic waste/ fertilizer/ chemicals caused the problem? In this Valley even Ben Snipes, the original cattle baron, could have had cattle at those locations defecating in the water. All of the dairies in Washington State have been required to have established Nutrient Management Plans filed with the State (WSDA and NCRS monitored) for the last 15 years+. These plans are based on the best science available for managing waste, and are administered by another arm of government. These plans have already helped clean up the Granger Ditch and the Yakima River dramatically.

Since these dairymen are published as "guilty" by the EPA, which dairies will they hit next? Where will it end? If they can't get all of the water back to pristine levels will they then go over the crop growers, the orchardists, the vineyardists- killing one industry after another. Now the environmental groups are salivating on the sidelines with lawsuits that will not solve the problem, only keep the attorneys in the money for a long time.

Why am I writing this? My house has a well with nitrates that is 20 miles away from a dairy and I put in a de-nitration system. Problem solved.