



Input on Lower Yakima Valley Nitrate Study

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11/29/2012 04:58 PM

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My husband and I are dairy farmers in Washington State. We have been in the dairy business since 1976 at the same location. We have seen many changes over the years, both economically and environmentally. We have implemented millions of dollars of upgrades to our farm in the past 15 years to be good stewards of the land, and we have complied with all of the necessary regulations. There have been times when that has been difficult and financially challenging, but we have stepped-up and done what was asked of us. We were under the impression that the recent Groundwater Management Area that was recently implemented by Yakima County was going to be addressing the nitrate issues in our area. Why is the EPA involved?

The recent EPA report targeting four Yakima Valley dairy farm families is disturbing for many reasons, but most of all for the lack of scientific data. Dairy farmers throughout the United States rely upon NRCS Standards for best management practices and operating procedures. We adhere to science-based standards and are routinely inspected by the Washington Department of Agriculture. We register our farms with the appropriate agencies. Why is EPA applying new standards based upon limited data?

If the EPA is questioning the NRCS standards, that is a national issue, not an issue with just Yakima Valley farms.

If another governmental agency, EPA, totally ignores or gives no credibility to NRCS, what are farmers supposed to do? Why should innocent victims get caught in the crossfire between two government agencies, EPA and NRCS? It is not fair to put private citizens in the middle of governmental squabbles. It is disheartening that government agencies do not want to assist the small businesses that keep our economy solvent, but rather punish and regulate them. Dairies in Washington State are amongst the highly regulated in the United States.

Why isn't there a level playing field? Crop farmers, orchardists and other concerns can apply any amount of commercial fertilizer without any regulation; commercial fertilizer also contributes to the high nitrate problem. Why do other agricultural sectors just get a free pass?

There are more questions than answers provided in the report. Were all wells that were sampled in the same aquifer? What were the depths of sampled wells? Did anyone check the integrity of the well itself? What was the well location with respect to the septic system? Were effects of other crops and fertilizers used researched?

What was the age of the water in question? Is this a legacy problem or is the

problem current?

I would like to see the comment period extended to allow for a more thorough scientific review by experts. Our future and the future of all of our employees, their families and the community is at stake; the economic impact of the dairies of the Yakima Valley is crucial to the survival of this area.