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RON CURRY  
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### **Environment Department Receives Plan to Investigate Groundwater Contamination at La Jolla Dairy near Portales**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department received a Stage 1 Abatement Plan proposal from the La Jolla dairy northwest of Portales to investigate soil and groundwater pollution at the site.

The Department's Ground Water Quality Bureau required the dairy, which is located 5.5 miles northwest of Portales on State Route 236, to submit the plan to address soil and groundwater pollution associated with its operation. The purpose of a Stage 1 investigation is to define the extent of soil and groundwater pollution at a site where groundwater contamination has been identified. New Mexico's Water Quality Control Commission's regulations require responsible parties to remediate groundwater pollution.

Wastewater from dairy operations at La Jolla Dairy is discharged to a single clay-lined lagoon and then applied to crop land for nutrient uptake. Groundwater in the vicinity of the dairy is monitored regularly through wells at the dairies and is contaminated with nitrate, chloride, and total dissolved solids at levels above New Mexico groundwater quality standards. New Mexico's groundwater quality standards are 10 parts per million (mg/L) for nitrate, 250 mg/L for chloride, and 1,000 mg/L for TDS.

La Jolla's Stage 1 Abatement Plan proposal shows current maximum concentrations of nitrate at 30 mg/L (reported as nitrogen), chloride at 325 mg/L, and TDS at 1,515 mg/L. The dairy proposes to investigate groundwater pollution by continuing to monitor groundwater quality through the existing monitoring wells and mapping of existing wells within a one-mile radius of the facility. No additional collection of soil samples, installation of monitoring wells, or the collection of additional groundwater samples to define the extent of soil and groundwater pollution has been proposed as required by the WQCC regulations.

Once a Stage 1 Abatement Plan has been approved and completed, a proposed Stage 2 Abatement Plan will be submitted to NMED. The Stage 2 plan will outline proposed actions to clean up the pollution identified as a result of the Stage 1 investigation. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the Stage 2 Plan and may also request a hearing. The department will seek public comment within ninety days of receiving the plan.

Monitoring data available to the department shows that more than 65 percent of dairies in New Mexico have polluted groundwater beneath their facilities. Proposed discharge regulations specific to the dairy industry address environmental issues such as how groundwater is best protected, the lining of wastewater lagoons, and monitoring well requirements.

The department drafted new regulations for dairies as a result of legislation passed in the last regular session in 2009. Senate Bill 206 implemented changes to the New Mexico Water Quality Act and required the WQCC to adopt new regulations that identify specific requirements for the discharge of dairy wastewater to protect groundwater quality. The regulations, which the dairy industry requested to provide more certainty in laws governing dairies, are available at:

<http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/gwb/documents/RevisedDairyRegs.pdf>

Those regulations include requirements for protective liners for wastewater storage lagoons and an early warning system of sentry wells to monitor and protect underground aquifers against pollution. According to the regulation development schedule approved by the WQCC, a public hearing before the WQCC is scheduled to begin on April 13, 2010. Public notice regarding the public hearing and hearing participation was published on Jan. 29, 2010.

A copy of the proposed La Jolla Dairy Stage 1 Abatement Plan is available by contacting:

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