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Environment Department Receives Plans to Investigate Groundwater Contamination at Seven Dairies near Roswell, Announces Draft Dairy Regulations

Department Will Hold Meetings for Public on Upcoming Dairy Rules

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department’s Ground Water Quality Bureau received Stage 1 Abatement Plan proposals to investigate soil and groundwater pollution at seven dairies south and east of Roswell.

The dairies – 3-V, Yorktown, Southern Skies, Arroyo, Tom Visser, Baca Linda, and Pirtle Farms – must submit Stage 1 Abatement Plans to address soil and groundwater pollution created by dairy operations.

The seven dairies discharge dairy wastewater to lagoons, where the water is subsequently applied to crops. Those discharges contaminated groundwater with nitrate, chloride, and total dissolved solids at levels above New Mexico groundwater quality standards. State groundwater quality standards are 10 parts per million (mg/L) for nitrate, 250 mg/L for chloride, and 1,000 mg/L for TDS. York and the adjacent 3-V dairy will submit a joint plan. Southern Skies and Arroyo dairies will also submit a joint plan.

New Mexico water quality regulations require responsible parties to remediate groundwater pollution. The abatement plan proposes the collection of soil samples, installation of monitoring wells and collection of groundwater samples to define the extent of soil and groundwater pollution. After the plan has been completed, a Stage 2 cleanup proposal will be submitted to the bureau. Members of the public will have an opportunity to comment on the Stage 2 plan and request a hearing before the department. The department will seek public comment within 90 days of receiving that plan.

”Unfortunately, this contamination highlights a growing problem around the state,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “The department’s scientific data indicates that more than 65 percent of dairies have polluted the groundwater beneath their facilities. To help address this problem and give the dairy industry more certainty in their requirements the department recently issued draft regulations for dairy discharges.”

“These regulations, requested by the dairy industry, will provide specific requirements for dairies related to pollution from facility operations,” said NMED Water and Waste Management Division Director Marcy

Leavitt. “We look forward to receiving advice and input from residents and members of the dairy industry in upcoming meetings we will hold around the state to explain how those regulations will affect dairy owners and citizens.”

The department drafted the proposed discharge regulations specific to the dairy industry that will address issues such as how groundwater is best protected, the lining of wastewater lagoons and monitoring well requirements. New regulations are required as a result legislation passed in the last session with the strong support of the dairy industry, Senate Bill 206. That bill created changes to the state Water Quality Act and requires the state Water Quality Control Commission to adopt regulations to identify requirements for the discharge of dairy wastewater to protect groundwater quality and provide the dairy industry with clearly identified requirements. The draft regulations are now open to public comment.

The department will also hold the following public meetings to take input and comments on the discussion draft of the proposed regulations. Public meetings are scheduled from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at the following locations:

- Hobbs - June 1 (New Mexico Junior College, Training and Outreach Facility, Room 122A)
- Portales - June 2 (City of Portales Memorial Building, 200 E. 7th Street)
- Roswell - June 15 (Roswell Convention and Civic Center, 912 N. Main St.)
- Mesquite - June 16 (Del Cerro Multipurpose Center, 180 La Fe Ave.)
- Los Lunas - June 23 (Los Lunas Campus, Building A, 1000 Main St.)

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