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## **Environment Department Receives Plans to Investigate Groundwater Contamination at Three Dairies in Chaves County**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department received Stage 1 Abatement Plan proposals to investigate soil and groundwater pollution at three dairies located south and east of Roswell.

The department's Ground Water Quality Bureau required the dairies to submit those plans to address soil and groundwater pollution associated with their operations. The dairies include El Visto, Woodcrest and Nature's.

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 regulations require responsible parties to remediate groundwater pollution.

Wastewater from the dairies is discharged to a clay and synthetically-lined lagoon and then applied to crops through pivot and flood irrigation. Storm water runoff is retained in an unlined impoundment and pumped out following rainstorms. Groundwater 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. 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.

El Visto Dairy's proposal shows current maximum concentrations of nitrate and TDS in groundwater as 32 mg/l and 2,260 mg/l, respectively. Woodcrest Dairy's proposal shows current maximum concentrations of nitrate, chloride, and TDS in groundwater are 20 mg/l, 2,400 mg/l, and 7,440 mg/l, respectively. Nature's Dairy proposal shows that in June 2009 maximum concentrations of nitrate, chloride, and TDS in groundwater were 81 mg/l, 1,900 mg/l, and 8,200 mg/l, respectively. All three dairies propose to investigate groundwater pollution through the compilation of existing on-site water quality data, inventory of potential contaminant sources, inventory of existing supply wells and water quality within a one-mile radius of the facility, compilation of hydrogeologic data, and the preparation of a report. No additional collection of soil samples, installation of monitoring wells, or the collection of groundwater samples to define the extent of soil and ground water pollution is currently proposed.

Once a Stage 1 Abatement Plan has been completed, a proposed Stage 2 Abatement Plan will be submitted to NMED outlining proposed actions to clean up the pollution which was 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 90 days of receiving the plan.

Monitoring data available to the department shows that more than 65 percent of dairies in the state have groundwater contamination associated with their facilities. Proposed discharge regulations specific to the dairy industry address 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. Senate Bill 206 implemented changes to the New Mexico Water Quality Act and required the Water Quality Control Commission 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 from pollution.

According to the regulation development schedule approved by the WQCC, a public hearing before the WQCC is scheduled to begin on March 9, 2010. Public notice regarding the public hearing and hearing participation is scheduled to be published by February 1, 2010.

A copy of the proposed Stage 1 Abatement Plan for these dairies is available by contacting:

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