

Dairy Business Association: Dairy group endorses manure standards approach but sees need for changes

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Contact: Maria Woldt, director of industry relations
Dairy Business Association
608-577-4345
mwoldt@widba.com

GREEN BAY, Wis. (Sept. 13, 2017) – A group representing Wisconsin dairy farmers says it agrees with the need for added manure regulations in eastern parts of the state, but only for areas with shallow soils, and says farmers need access to updated soil-depth maps.

The state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has proposed the rules to address decades-old groundwater quality issues in an area that generally has shallow soils over heavily fractured bedrock. Scientists, for example, have identified contamination from livestock and human waste in private wells in Kewaunee County, which is in the area designated for the rules.

“Given the well-documented groundwater quality issues, it makes sense to take targeted steps to further protect the environment and people’s health,” said Mike North, president of the Dairy Business Association, which has hundreds of farmers and agribusinesses as members. “Protecting water quality is a community effort and the agricultural community accepts its role. We all want clean water.”

However, North said, some aspects of the state’s proposal must be reconsidered. “There’s more work to be done to make sure these rules are practical and effective,” he said.

Among items to address:

The inclusion of areas with more than 5 feet of soil.

The targeted standards farmers would have to follow would vary based on the depth of soil in their fields. The DNR wants to include areas with up to 20 feet of soil. The dairy group wants that depth set at 5 feet. "Verifying soil depth beyond a few feet rapidly becomes an expensive and cumbersome process," North said.

A requirement that farmers verify soil depths.

Farmers should be allowed to rely on maps for verifying soil depths, North said. However, he said, applicable maps, where they are known to exist, are outdated by decades. "The state needs new maps that are created using the most up-to-date techniques. We need more accurate information."

The narrow application of the rules among the farmers in the area.

Because of broad exemptions from existing NR 151 rules, most of the cows in the sensitive area are on smaller farms that would not be covered by the changes.

North said the standards should apply to as many farms as possible in the designated area. "This is not just a large-farm issue. For meaningful water quality progress to be had, we need to move everyone toward compliance."

A public hearing on the DNR proposal is scheduled for Friday.

DBA was proud to represent the dairy community on the workgroup that spent nearly a year providing input on the proposed changes and will continue to participate as the process moves forward, North said.

"We want to ensure that the final product brings about lasting environmental improvements, while also being practical for farmers to implement," he said.

[Click here](#) for more about the proposed DNR rule revisions and the process.

About the DBA:

The Dairy Business Association is a nonprofit organization comprised of Wisconsin dairy farmers, milk processors, vendors and business partners who came together in 1999 to reinvigorate the state's dairy community. Its members work to guarantee Wisconsin dairy farmers of all sizes have the support they need to thrive in the state's economy, communities and food supply chain. For more information, visit widba.com.