

In Balance

A Newsletter for the Whatcom County Dairy Industry



Whatcom Producers Sign Up for \$8 Million in EQIP Funds

In February 2003, 114 Whatcom County agricultural producers signed up for \$8 million in Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds. Statewide the EQIP sign-up for 2003 was \$85 million. Thus, Whatcom producers represented nearly 10% of the state's total. No official word has been released about which projects will receive funding by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), but according to statements made by NRCS State Conservationist, R.L. "Gus" Hughbanks, few producers should get their hopes up for this year.

"Unfortunately, we won't be able to fund most of these applications for this year. But they will be in the mix next year and the year after that".

NRCS State Conservationist, R.L. "Gus" Hughbanks, concerning 2003 EQIP funds

Hughbanks, who is new to the state, previously served with NRCS in Nebraska. Seemingly surprised at the level of program participation here in Washington, Hughbanks said, "The EQIP sign-up was nearly twelve times our usual. That speaks well for the conservation ethic of the people of Washington". However, he concluded by saying, "Unfortunately, we won't be able to fund most of these applications for this year. But they will be in the mix next year and the year after that". Producers signing up for future programs may also anticipate changes such as establishment of a statewide contract maximum, revision of the established cost share rates (currently 75%), and revision of practice hold-down rates (many now set at 50K).

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**Whatcom
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

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Robert Barker, Chair
Jerry VanDellen, Vice-Chair
Fred Tjoelker, Sec/Treasurer
Cornie Timmermans, Supervisor
Rod Visser, Supervisor

WCD Dairy Team Staff

Chris Clark, Mark Ockey &
Chuck Timblin

DAIRY INDUSTRY GAINS GREATER REPRESENTATION

Rod Visser and Cornie Timmermans Fill Positions On Conservation District Board



Rod Visser

In April two Lynden area dairy farmers, Rod Visser and Cornie Timmermans, began serving on the Whatcom Conservation District Board of Supervisors. The pair join fellow dairyman, Jerry VanDellen, on the District's five member board made up of two appointed members and three elected members. In a county-wide election, Visser was voted into office on March 10th and took over the board position formerly held by Brian Cieslar. Timmermans was appointed by the Washington State Conservation Commission to occupy the position formerly held by Ken Thomas. The term of office for each position is 3 years.

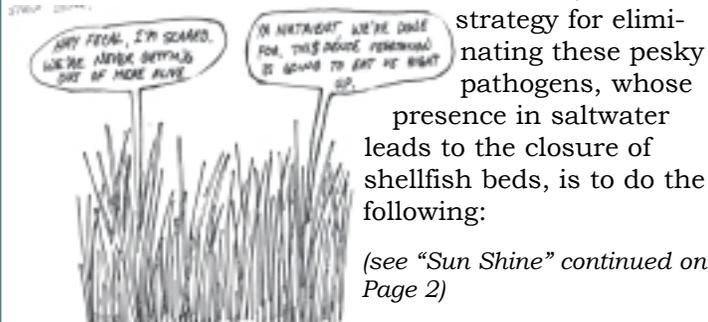


Cornie Timmermans

Annihilate Fecal Coliform Bacteria While the Sun Shines

Two principal reasons are cited for avoiding manure applications during fall and winter months. First, due to high seasonal rainfall, soils become saturated. If manure is applied during this time, there is an increased potential for field runoff to carry nutrients, bacteria, and sediment along with it. The second reason is that plant uptake of nutrients is minimal during the nongrowing season. This minimal uptake increases the risk of nutrient leaching and further adds to the potential that field runoff will be laden with nutrients. Not often mentioned is a third reason to avoid manure applications during the fall and winter: the sun doesn't shine very much during this time period. The lack of sunshine has implications in terms of controlling one important indicator of water quality: fecal coliform (FC) bacteria.

In a literature review recently completed (December 2002) by Manjit K. Neger for the Lummi Indian Business Council, solar radiation (i.e. sunlight) was identified by numerous sources as the leading killer of fecal coliform in the environment. Thus, the best strategy for eliminating these pesky pathogens, whose presence in saltwater leads to the closure of shellfish beds, is to do the following:



DON'T FORGET!!

Dairy Plan Certification Deadline Draws Near

According to state law, the deadline for Dairy Nutrient Management Plan (Dairy Farm Plan) certification is December 31, 2003. Certification requires the following:

- A review of your farm plan to determine if it has been fully implemented and is currently in nutrient balance.
- Confirmation that all streams and ditches are protected with either a grass filter strip or a relay (interseeded) crop across the entire field.
- Update of your plan if changes that affect nutrient management have been made in your operation.

If your dairy plan has not been certified yet, then please contact one of the District's dairy planners (Chris, Mark or Chuck) so they can assist you!

Managing Nitrogen for Profit and Stewardship Workshop:

Redraft of Publications Comes After Producer Concerns Aired

In January 2003 at Homestead Farms Convention Center in Lynden, a workshop was held to discuss some of the latest issues pertaining to nitrogen management. Nearly 70 dairy producers, university researchers, and nutrient management consultants from both the public and private sector attended the workshop. One outcome of this workshop was that nitrogen

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Natural Resources Conservation Service To Release Technical Standard for Anaerobic Digestion:

Anaerobic digestion (AD) is the name of the process required to create methane gas. Dairy manure's potential use as a fuel stock to produce methane (biogas), coupled with the volatile energy market, has spurred a considerable amount of interest in the feasibility of producing biogas locally. The energy potential of methane can be harnessed to produce both heat and electricity. And other products and/or potential benefits of AD may be of even greater interest economically. For instance, the digested fiber left after AD is completed can be used as dairy bedding material, high quality compost, and as an organic soil amendment in the nursery industry. Also, because greenhouse gas emissions are reduced when methane is used as a fuel, there might be a potential market for both carbon credits and green tag electricity.

The USDA will release its technical standard for AD (Anaerobic Digester-Controlled Temperature 366) at a conference in early June 2003 to be held in Raleigh, NC. This step will enable farmers interested in AD technology to seek both technical and financial assistance for the construction of AD facilities. Chris Clark, a Resource Specialist with the Conservation District, will be attending this conference. Chris has been involved with various technical and economic aspects of AD for the last few years. Contact Chris with your questions about this and other issues related to AD.

Conservation District Study Will Track Relay Crop Management

Relay crops (i.e. annual rye interseeded in corn at the 3 to 6 leave stage) are currently being planted on more than half the silage corn ground in Whatcom County. The relay crops are grown here because of their superior ability, when compared to winter rye and wheat, to provide winter cover and take up residual nutrients after corn is harvested. The use of cover crops as a feed is increasing steadily. Shabtai Bittman, a research scientist at Ag-Canada's facility in Agassiz, B.C., introduced relay crops to this area. A concern he raised was that if relay crops are not harvested then they may add nitrogen to the cropland soil, instead of reducing it. The Conservation District would like to find out if relay crop management affects crop yield and residual nitrate levels after harvest in the fall. In a study the District hopes to begin this spring, soil nitrogen levels and crop yields will be tracked over the course of the growing season in relay crop fields receiving three different treatments within the same field. The treatments will include spraying out the relay crop (with glyphosphate), discing out the relay without spraying or harvesting it, and harvesting it prior to discing. In addition, some fields will receive only liquid manure and others only solid manure. The project will be supervised by Lynn Johnson, PhD, who is currently working for both WSU and the Conservation District.



Yield and nitrate levels will be tracked in relay crop fields to compare areas that were sprayed out with areas that were not.

Sun Shine *(continued from Page 1)*



- Apply manure during the growing season when day length is longest and the sun shines brightest.
- Leave a buffer between application areas and ditches to increase the distance between areas of application and waterways. Bacteria must travel farther to reach the waterway, thus prolonging exposure to solar radiation.

If you apply manure during winter, fecal coliform will not only survive longer, but it will also turn up in water more quickly due to increased runoff from fields. Additionally, due to soil erosion resulting from intense winter rainfall on open cropland, water becomes clouded with suspended sediment. The cloudiness, or turbidity, further reduces sunlight's ability to kill the bacteria. With most local livestock producers and custom manure handlers no longer applying manure during the winter, it's little wonder that fecal coliform levels have dropped so dramatically in recent years. Now we know more about why that strategy has worked so well.

Managing Nitrogen *(continued from Page 1)*

management recommendations in a draft publication from Oregon State University (titled *Post-harvest soil nitrate testing.....in western Oregon and Washington*) were revised after hearing producer and consultant concerns. In the latest version (draft 3) the recommended post-harvest nitrate-N levels that indicate when application rates should be reduced in grass fields for hay or silage were raised by 50% (e.g. instead of 10 ppm or less post-harvest nitrate-N being the suggested limit at which to continue present N management, the level was raised to 15 ppm). The concerns of producers and consultants that led to this revision were backed up by data from soil tests and other nutrient management records that have been maintained over the last several years.

