

EPA Approves First Round of Dairy Consent Agreements

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently approved the first round of dairy Air Consent Agreements. As a result, the EPA's Environmental Appeals Board has sent letters to those participating dairies to finalize the approval process.

EPA has mailed letters to 286 of the 600 dairies participating in the Consent Agreement. None of the 286 Agreements included any Confidential Business Information (CBI). EPA is in the process of reviewing comments from the affected AFOs on the CBI component and based on the comments, EPA will determine how to proceed with the rest of the dairy agreements that have the CBI attached.

In the letter EPA is sending to producers, EPA requests payment for the penalty fee. Depending on the farm size, participating producers must pay a penalty so that EPA can legally release participating dairy farms from possible past violations of the Clean Air Act, CERCLA and EPCRA. The penalty breakdown is as follows:

- Under 700 mature cows - \$200 per dairy
- 700 to 6,999 mature cows - \$500 per dairy
- 7,000 or more mature cows - \$1,000 per dairy

There have been some questions from producers about the penalty fee. If a producer has any questions regarding their letter from EPA or the penalty amount, they should contact Sanda Howland at (202) 564-5022 or Tim Sullivan at (202) 564-2723 at EPA headquarters.

High Energy Costs Lead to Extended EQIP Deadline

Recognizing that high energy costs have delayed completion of many Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) projects, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has extended the deadline for farmers to complete their projects and receive EQIP financial assistance. The deadline now is September 1, pushed back from June 30.

A one-time payment adjustment is available to farmers who signed EQIP contracts in 2004 or earlier and who complete EQIP projects between March 1 and September 1 of this year. A 15-percent payment increase is available for specific practices that increased in price 20 percent or more due to rising energy costs or higher prices for construction materials including steel, concrete and plastic pipe.

"Farmers and ranchers have put various conservation practices on hold because of the recent increases in the cost of energy," says USDA Secretary Mike Johanns. "As part of our commitment to help mitigate the impact of high energy costs on agricultural producers, this cost adjustment and time extension will lessen the impact of energy prices on farmers and ranchers, while protecting our natural resources."

Administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, EQIP is a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality.

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