EPA releases Lower Yakima Valley Nitrate Study for public review and input

EPA, state agencies, local dairies, local communities and others embrace collaborative approach to protect drinking water

(Seattle -September 27, 2012) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released today a report for public input that assesses likely sources of nitrate pollution - including dairy farms and crop fields - in Lower Yakima Valley groundwater and some drinking water wells. The Agency has begun collaborative efforts with state agencies, dairy farmers and community stakeholders to develop and implement lasting solutions to water quality problems. The EPA will accept public input on the report until November 30.

EPA will host two public meetings in Granger to explain the initial study findings and gather input. Both meetings will be held on **Thursday, September 27** at the **Northwest Communities Education Center at 121 Sunnyside Ave**. The first meeting will be from **2:00 PM to 4:00 PM** and the second will be from **6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**.

EPA began its study in 2009 following a multi-agency report from Washington State's Department of Agriculture, Department of Ecology, and Department of Health, the Yakima County Public Works Department, and EPA recommending that more work was needed to identify the sources of nitrate contamination in ground water and drinking water in the lower Yakima Valley.

According to Tom Eaton, Director of EPA's Washington Operations Office in Olympia, the study provides information on the sources of nitrate contamination, and could help identify areas for collaborative public-private partnerships to assure access to clean drinking water and reduce nitrate loading in the region's groundwater.

"We intend to use this study to assist local efforts to protect valley drinking water," said Eaton. "We particularly appreciate the willingness of the dairies with whom we have engaged to be part of the solution. We also know there are broader sources that need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner."

"While the dairies identified in the study have had only a few days to begin to understand its many details, conclusions and assumptions, this study builds on the mutual goals of the EPA and the region's dairies to assure access to safe drinking water for local residents," said Jay Gordon, Executive Director of the Washington State Dairy Federation. Gordon continued, "We will also be working on an agreed upon plan to assess operational changes necessary to provide additional protection of groundwater quality."

Ted Sturdevant, the Director of the Washington Department of Ecology, said, "This study helps bring the causes of nitrate contaminated drinking water in the Valley into sharper focus. It's now up to all of us to find a path forward that reduces risks to people's health."

"This report provides new data that we can use in the ongoing effort to improve environmental protection in our community," said Dan Newhouse, the Director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture. "I know how committed the dairies and other farmers are to protecting the environment, and the people in

their communities so I'm confident that a can-do, collaborative approach will result in a win-win solution for everyone involved."

Roylene Rides-at-the-Door, the Washington State Conservationist of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service said, "The EPA study is an opportunity to learn more about farm practices, and how better BMPs -- and possibly new technologies -- might help farms better manage their nutrients. We're committed to helping find - and possibly fund - some solutions."

Next Steps

EPA will accept public input on the report until November 30.

Due to the nature of groundwater movement and the extent of contamination, the EPA recognizes that it may take many years to reduce the nitrate levels throughout the Valley.

In the meantime, the agency is committed to a collaborative, problem-solving effort with state agencies, the Yakama Nation, Yakima County, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the agricultural industry and others which will include:

- Appropriate measures to reduce or eliminate nitrate contamination of groundwater
- Provide safe drinking water for affected residents where necessary
- Conduct long-term monitoring to track progress

EPA will continue to work with the state-sponsored, locally led Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee to develop a comprehensive plan to protect the groundwater. EPA will also work with the Yakama Nation to develop a similar program to protect the groundwater of the Yakama Reservation.

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To view a copy of the report: [HYPERLINK "http://www.epa.gov/region10/pdf/sites/yakimagw/nitrate_in_water_wells_study_9-27-2012.pdf"]

For more information, visit the website: [HYPERLINK "http://yosemite.epa.gov/R10/WATER.NSF/GWPU/lyakimagw"]