

Eastern Schools Find About 50% of Water Systems Polluted

Eastern Lancaster County School District elementary agriculture students have participated in what is regarded as the most extensive water testing program ever conducted in Lancaster County—possibly in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

And the results have farmers and development dwellers alike talking.

The buzz stems from the fact that about half of the 800 private water systems tested during the past four years has been found to contain water that is polluted and unsafe for human consumption, based on state health department standards.

Of 297 private water systems checked during the past year, well over half, some 56.6 per cent, had coliform and 29 per cent had a nitrate level above the minimum safe level set by the state.

The state coliform standard is zero, about one fourth of the systems tested showed a count of 16-plus which is the highest count the test will show.

While a count of 10 is the maximum considered safe for

nitrate, some of the tests showed a count of up to 60.

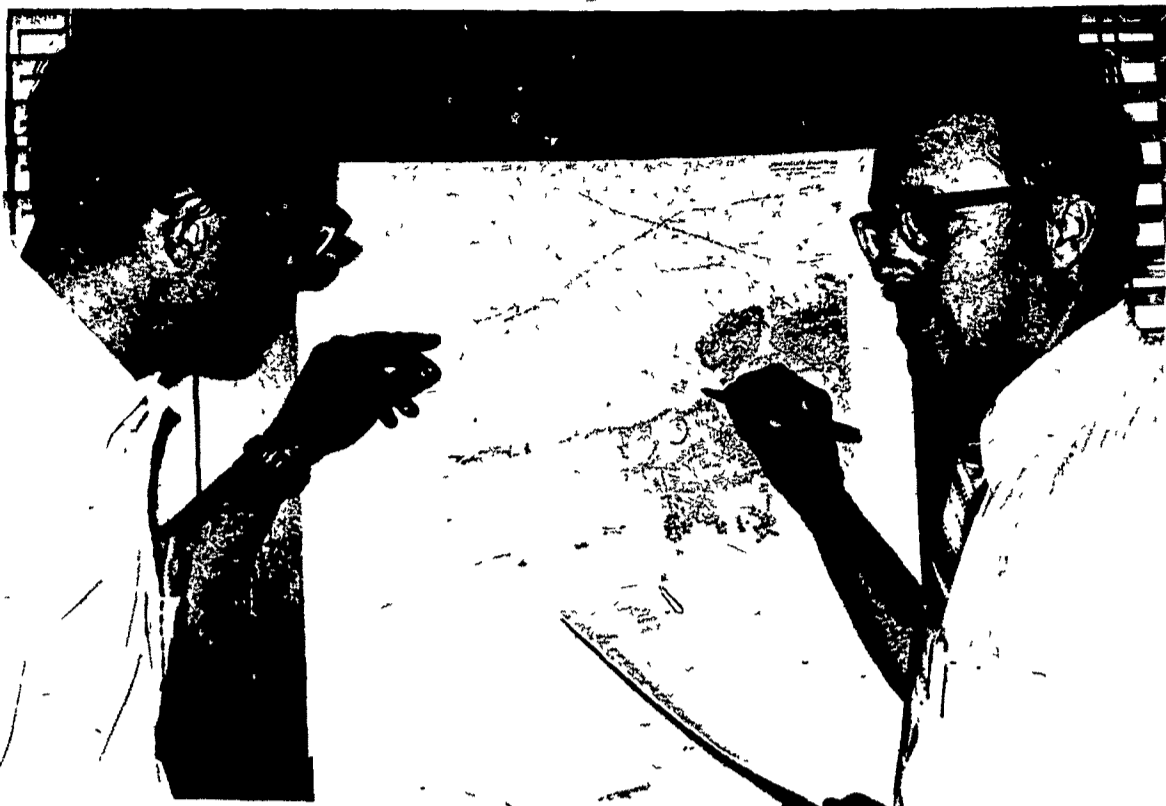
Some systems had both a high coliform count and a high nitrate count.

The actual testing was done by Lancaster Laboratories in conjunction with the elementary ag program of Eastern Lancaster School District.

Sixth grade students in the ag program, which is under the direction of Robert Herr, had the opportunity to have the home water supply tested. This year 297 were tested and in the previous three years another 500 were tested. Herr estimated about 95 per cent of the sixth grade students participated in the strictly voluntary program.

Robert Simon, Eastern District School superintendent, who has shown an interest in the program, stated, "We look for purity in food, but water can be just as important."

Herr said the coliform can be removed from private well or spring systems by installation of a chlorinator or ultra violet light system. But he emphasized that there is no practical way to re-



Robert Herr, left, Eastern School district elementary ag teacher, and Robert Simon, school district superintendent, plot the locations of contaminated water systems in the

district on a map. Studies over the past four years indicate about half of all water systems in the district are contaminated.

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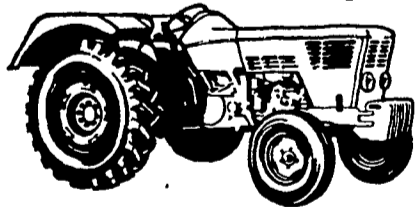
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Although the water in the glass may be cool, clear, and sparkling bright, that is no proof that it is safe to drink, Penn State emphasizes.

The nitrate problem is of a different nature. The state health department notes that "serious and occasionally fatal poisonings in infants have occurred following ingestion of well water shown to contain nitrates."

The bulletin also notes that: "Nitrate poisoning appears to be confined to infants during their first few months of life; adults drinking the same water are not affected but breast-fed infants of mothers drinking the water may be poisoned." Also, "Both man and animals can be poisoned by nitrate if the concentration is sufficiently great."

What is the source of this pollution? While the sources are varied and sometimes difficult or impossible to pinpoint in specific instances, much of the problem stems from the area's fine limestone soil. While this soil is an excellent producer of farm crops, it will also carry pollution for miles in the underground water system. This means that a contaminated water system may be contaminated from a source several miles away.

The initial 500-samples were evaluated according to their location on farms, rural non-farms and developments. It was found that 52 per cent of farm water systems were polluted, 29 per cent of rural non-farm systems were polluted and 40 per cent of systems in developments were polluted.

While the reason for the high rate of polluted systems on farms is not known for sure, Herr speculated it is probably from animal waste run-off. He said that the development pollution probably stems largely from drainage from septic tanks. He said he also noticed that where there is a stream nearby, the chances are very good for a polluted system.

Looking to the future, Herr foresees that the problem of polluted water systems will become much greater in the school district. He notes that there's new industry, new developments, and higher concentrations of livestock on farms. All these help pollute the underground water system.

Herr emphasized that it's very difficult to evaluate the pollution from a health standpoint unless there is something sensational

(Continued on Page 23)