

Study Shows Most Wells Unfit For Use

More than half the farmers in Lancaster County are endangering the health of their families and their livestock by letting them consume contaminated well water, according to two samplings.

Testing of 27 northern Lancaster County farms showed that drinking water is unfit for human consumption in about 60 percent of the samplings.

Another sampling of about 1,200 farms in eastern Lancaster County over the past five years showed that the drinking water was unfit for human consumption in about 57 per cent of the samplings.

HIGH BACTERIA COUNT

Most dangerous to the county's rural residents and livestock is the high content of coliform bacteria in the water which breeds typhoid, dysentery, diarrhea and intestinal worms.

Also present in a majority of the samplings was a high content of nitrates which is also dangerous especially to infants.

The alarming high incidence of rural water supply pollution was discussed by a panel of experts Tuesday night before the Ephrata Adult Farmer class at Ephrata Area High School, which conducted such a sampling in

northern Lancaster County.

Charles Ackley, agriculture teacher of the Ephrata Adult Farmer program, said the samplings were taken with the utmost care and precision. He said the situation is a grave one of which many farmers are unaware.

Dr. Melvyn G. Wenger, an Ephrata veterinarian, said many livestock abortions and poor production, such as in dairy cattle, can be attributed to contaminated water.

He also noted that the polluted water is just as dangerous, if not more so, to humans. He said breast-fed babies of mothers who drink the contaminated water can develop serious complications.

According to the Ephrata area samplings for the coliform test, only 41 percent of the drinking water was safe. Ackley said 11 percent can be considered hazardous and 48 percent unfit.

In the nitrate test, 37 percent was found potable, with less than 10 parts per million of nitrates, which 63 percent tested unpotable.

One of the panel members, Dr. Robert D. Herr, vocational agriculture teacher with the Eastern Lancaster County School

District, said samplings conducted by his students over the past five years show similar results.

Dr. Herr said his students have conducted over 1,200 samplings over the past five years, with 57 percent testing unfit.

This year, he said, his student took about 300 samples with 46.7 percent showing dangerous levels of coliform. In the nitrate testing, he said 29 percent were over the health standard.

He also said that in a study three years ago, 52 percent of the farms tested showed unfit water. Compared to that, he said 29 percent of rural nonfarm residents had contaminated water and 40 percent of the residents in developments without municipal water supplies showed unfit.

James Humphreville, a Lancaster Consulting geologist, said much of the problem results from poorly placed wells.

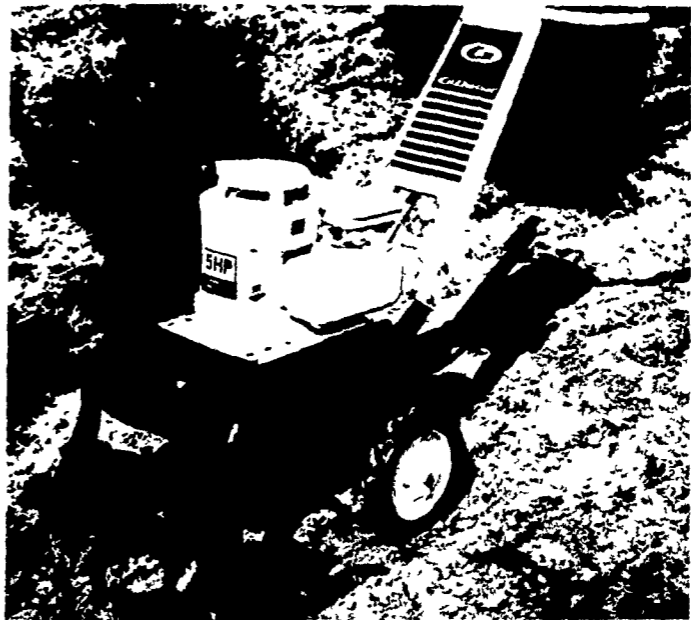
Humphreville said his testing has shown that many wells are contaminated from nearby septic tanks or drainage from nearby cow pastures where either excess manure or nitrate fertilizers are in excess.

According to C. Robert Graham, microbiologist with Lancaster Laboratories Inc., water tests should be taken every six months where well water is used.

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