

Crop irrigation on increase in Northeast U.S.

UNIVERSITY PARK — Irrigated cropland in the northeastern United States most likely will increase by 45 percent between 1982 and the year 2000, due primarily by over-use of water supplies for western agriculture.

Although water supply in the East is generally adequate, circumstances can arise where local supplies are limited or where the quality of water available is impaired for the intended use, points out David DeWalle, professor of forest hydrology at Penn State.

"Agricultural runoff itself can pollute surface and groundwater," DeWalle says. "Surface water contamination comes from sediment, runoff of fertilizer nutrients from fields, pesticides, and from feedlot and livestock waste management systems."

Groundwater contamination usually is in the form of nitrates, bacteria, pesticides, and salinity, he adds. Nitrates and salinity may become a growing problem in the Northeast and there is some question as to the safe consumption limit for livestock.

"Nitrates in groundwater in many agricultural areas of the Northeast already exceed Safe Drinking Water Limits," he emphasizes.

DeWalle, a speaker at the recent Lime, Fertilizer, and Pesticide Conference held in Hershey, says

oil and gas production are currently increasing in parts of the Northeast, with continued increases expected. Sediment from road and drilling site construction and chemicals in natural bines, drilling muds, fracturing, and recovery liquids are all possible pollutants.

"Deep drilling also can change water flow patterns for groundwater, if impermeable strata are penetrated or fractured," DeWalle notes.

Acid precipitation on poorly buffered soils can gradually reduce soil pH, increase lime requirements and ultimately reduce pH in surface water and shallow groundwater. However, acid rain also can add a significant amount of sulfur which is a trace nutrient needed for plant growth and development.

He notes that precipitation in the Northeast has a pH of 4.0 to 5.5, a range that is not harmful to humans and livestock.

"Awareness and responsibility are key words in protecting agricultural water resources in the future. As the opportunity arises, we must act as responsible citizens to insure that policies and practices followed which affect our water resources are best choices for the future and not just expedient measures," DeWalle emphasizes.

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1,500	5'4"	9'0"	7	1,388	438.00
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3,000	5'4"	17'11"	7	2,432	720.00
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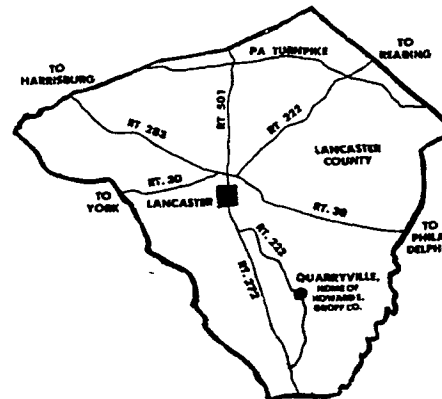
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