

Expert says dairymen don't cause pollution woes

NEW HOLLAND — It's not fair to blame North American dairymen for river and stream pollution problems if they control erosion, says Howard Winey of New Holland. Most dairymen have ample land for manure disposal.

But many confinement hog and poultry operations are headed for difficulty. It's the same story almost everywhere intensive systems are in use.

In the Netherlands, for example, nearly a third of the country has been placed off limits for hog and poultry expansion because of the manure problems. More manure is already produced than can be used by the crops that can grow there,

explains Winey, who is product manager for spreaders at New Holland.

Since they have too much manure slurry, they are hauling it to other areas up to 120 kilometers away — that's 75 miles for the tank truck. The Dutch complain that they're "up to their necks in slurry."

Legislation limiting the size of livestock and poultry operations can be predicted anywhere off-farm pollution problems are caused, says Winey. It could happen here, too, he adds. Some farmers are causing a problem even if they don't have animals, he points out. This is because soil

erosion carries off plant food nutrients in the soil no matter whether the nutrients come from manure or from chemical fertilizer. Environmentalists often aren't really sensitive to this reality.

When livestock and poultry numbers are limited to produce just the amount of manure that the crop land can use without excess build-up, the problem stays controlled, providing erosion is controlled.

Animals on pasture are almost never a problem because the numbers just aren't concentrated enough to cause a manure problem. When a dairy is pastured

even part of the year, the overall manure disposal problem usually doesn't get out of hand.

It's estimated a large Holstein dairy cow will produce a maximum of 474 pounds of nitrogen, 142 pounds of phosphate and 237 pounds of potassium in a year's time. That's assuming the cow never goes out to pasture.

But much of the nitrogen is in the form of ammonia and is lost to the atmosphere, unless it is stored as a liquid or treated with phosphate. Not nearly the entire amount is available for crop production.

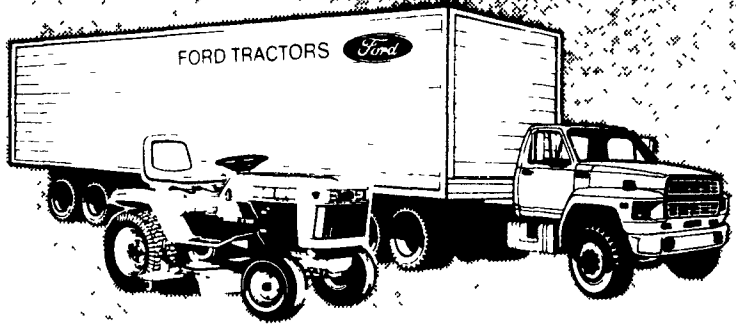
Winey points out this also means that the potential amount of nitrogen that could wash into

streams and rivers is also much less than the total amount produced.

Where erosion is controlled, dairymen usually aren't causing problems and it's unfair to blame them for the problems caused by large swine and poultry operations that have already created serious ground water nitrate problems in a few places.

Unless other solutions are found, the confinement hog and poultry operations may face the need to move their manure longer distances to farms that can use additional manure.

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