

# How Much Water Does Your Dairy Operation Use?

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Over the next couple of months, producers will read or hear a lot about agricultural water use. The reason: implementation of Act 220, The Water Resources Planning Act. This legislation was passed late in 2002 to address concerns related to recurring droughts, increased water use disputes, and an outdated State Water Plan.

Beginning this month, all livestock producers will receive pre-registration materials in the mail to determine who needs to register their water usage. By March 16, 2004, everyone who withdraws or uses more than 10,000 gallons per day, including agricultural operations, are required to register each source of water and report water use. There are no fees associated with registering or reporting. Agricultural operations using less than 10,000 gallons per day may voluntarily register water use.

In November, a more detailed registration form will be sent to those producers that are required to, or voluntarily choose to, register. The registration form will ask for water usage for 2003 if such record of usage is available or if it can be estimated. Subse-

quent to this one-time registration, water usage will be reported on an annual basis. Usage may be determined by metering, calculation or estimation. What this means to producers is that they will need to measure or estimate water use from EACH of their water sources and keep a monthly report. It is not uncommon for livestock operations to have more than one water source, i.e., two wells and a spring.

There are several ways dairy producers can determine the amount of water used on a daily basis. They include, but are not limited to water meters, equations to calculate water intake of lactating cows, and reference sources to estimate water usage of calves, heifers, and dry cows, and to estimate water usage of equipment and procedures on the dairy. Check with your local dairy extension agent for resources.

The primary goal of Act 220 is to provide accurate information to sustain water resource usage for Pennsylvania. The plan will help to answer three basic questions: 1) How much water does Pennsylvania have? 2) How much water does Pennsylvania use? 3) How much water will Pennsylvania need in the future? As this legislation moves forward, Cooperative Extension will provide resources to assist producers in determining water usage.

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