

Management of Milkhouse Wastewater

Memorandum of Agreement Between Massachusetts DAR and DEP

Summary

Effective April 13, 2009, a memorandum of agreement (MOA) has been developed between Massachusetts DAR and DEP regarding the management of milkhouse wastewater. This pilot program is the first step in dealing with the treatment of milkhouse wastewater (MHW) without requiring groundwater discharge permits and lifting the burden on dairy operations. Although this is a very positive first step, this MOA is specific in its language and scope.

The main points of this MOA are summarized below. Refer to the MOA itself for the full language.

1. This MOA is effective immediately, meaning that any MHW treatment system will fall under this agreement, including new contracts and any existing contracts where the treatment system has not yet been installed.
2. Currently, the only MHW treatment system covered under this MOA is the Vegetated Treatment Area (VTA), formerly called Wastewater Treatment Strip, designed and maintained according to NRCS Standard 635. There will be a mechanism for installing other treatment systems, such as bark beds or mound systems, and is discussed below.
3. To participate in this pilot program and install a MHW treatment system, the farmer must execute a written agreement with DAR to install and maintain it under the appropriate NRCS practice standard.
4. The pilot program provides for two categories of participant farms: Pilot Farms and Grantee Farms. There will be two Pilot Farms, where a VTA will be installed and monitored throughout the term of the MOA. All remaining farms will be categorized as a Grantee Farm.
5. Monitoring protocols are currently being developed, and should be finalized in the next month or so. DAR will collect the samples on the Pilot Farms, and DEP will analyze the samples. There will be no cost to the farmer for this monitoring.
6. One Pilot Farm already has a VTA installed, and a bark bed will be installed this summer. We are evaluating the suitability of another farm to install a VTA and serve as the second Pilot Farm.
7. Over the period of the MOA, DAR (with NRCS assistance) will gather qualitative data regarding the performance and cost effectiveness of installed treatment systems. A final report will be written.
8. The MOA is effective until December 31, 2011.
9. Should a site be inappropriate for a VTA due to unsuitable soils or lack of sufficient buffer below the area (refer to the 635 standard), then it should be possible to install a bark bed, mound system, or other treatment system. However, a process will first be needed to include these alternative systems into the MOA. We are already starting this process by developing a new Waste Treatment practice standard.

10. DAR has developed a web site that further explains the MOA and how farmers can be a participant in the pilot program as Grantee Farms (<http://www.mass.gov/agr/programs/pilot/index.htm>). AEEP and EQIP funds are available for MHW treatment systems.
11. NRCS should work with the participant to develop a nutrient management plan for the manure associated with the dairy operation.
12. This summary and the MOA are being added to Section 1 of the Massachusetts FOTG.