

EIR Science & Technology

EPA joins nitrate pollution offensive against farming

Marcia Merry exposes how the same crowd that started the scare over nitrates in meats is now claiming that farming is causing nitrates to pollute ground water.

Preventing “ground water contamination” is the theme now featured in almost every issue of farm journals, on every agenda of farm extension service meetings, and in environmental news coverage. In days gone by, one of the most popular scenes hanging in the parlor was that of gentle cows, grazing in the meadow and drinking at the brook. No more. If you see such a scene, you are now being programmed to worry that the manure runoff will pollute the stream, and find its way as nitrate contamination in your drinking water. Apart from a very few special cases of contaminated wells, this fear is baseless. The scare tactics over nitrate-contaminated surface and ground water was cooked up in the social engineering labs of such agencies as the Conservation Foundation. Based in Washington, D.C., this group, allied with the World Wildlife Fund, has specialized since the 1940s, in concocting pseudo-scientific terminology and campaigns to befuddle the public and lawmakers, all in the service of subverting modern science and technology, and preventing population growth.

Now such issues as preventing ground water contamination have become the core of policy drives by the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and allied government offices, and state legislatures.

Before he was head of the EPA, William K. Reilly was head of the Conservation Foundation/World Wildlife Fund. In the 1980s, the foundation conducted elaborate operations—books, seminars, briefings to legislators—to make an issue of “the impacts on water quality of runoff from agricultural and other lands,” according to the 1984 Annual Report of the Conservation Foundation. A “National Ground

Water Policy Forum” was set up. Reilly issued a statement in the 1984 Annual Report, called “Toward Environmental Realism,” in which he stressed “critical emerging problems posed by water contamination and use, particularly ground water.” The foundation pressed for action on the state and federal level to begin to curb and restrict agriculture in the name of keeping water supplies safe. Yet, the foundation persistently opposed expanding water and sewage treatment facilities to provide clean urban water, claiming these were boondoggles for civil engineers.

When Reilly took over at EPA earlier this year, he pledged that protecting ground water, by inhibiting agriculture, would be one of his chief issues. By the end of this year, EPA and USDA will publish a national ground water survey, despite the fact that the U.S. Geological Survey has in recent years conducted thorough reviews. The new EPA survey is a political ploy to scare the public, and also farmers, that farm fertilizers and other agricultural factors may be making their water unsafe.

On Sept. 7, a new report, “Alternative Agriculture,” stressed the same theme. The 480-page book, produced by the National Research Council (part of the National Academy of Sciences) says simply, “Many agricultural practices have an off-farm impact on society and the environment. Common agricultural practices have degraded surface water quality, and, to a lesser degree, ground water quality in most major farming regions. In recent years, state and federal agencies have recognized that off-farm costs of certain agricultural practices must be reduced, especially the costs associated with some pesticides, tillage methods, and excessively high

rates of manure and nitrogen fertilizer application.” Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter has repeated the same points, most recently at the national Farm Credit System meeting in Minneapolis in September, where he called ground water contamination an area of “reasonable concern.”

The Minnesota legislature has adopted sweeping rules for preserving clean water and for penalizing agriculture practices that threaten designated environmental zones in the state. Similar measures are pending in other states. In some local areas, a prospective farmer must present an elaborate livestock waste management plan—usually too demanding to be accomplished—before the local authorities will permit him to produce food.

In Texas, environmentalist lobbying has resulted in unheard-of fines from \$25,000 to over \$90,000 per farm, levied by the Water Commission this September against several dairy farmers in the Fort Worth area, because of water pollution. In the cases in question, bacteria from manure runoff into local streams is the issue, and not nitrates. But the legal mechanisms and precedents could be used in many other situations and locales against farmers.

Georgia Sen. Wyche Fowler (D-Ga.) has introduced federal legislation that includes severe penalties, to restrict farming in the name of protecting the environment. His radical bill, the “Farm Conservation and Water Protection Act,” may not pass Congress, but it is expected to be a key part of the 1990 new five-year farm bill.

Assault on agriculture in Europe

Parallel operations are being run in Western Europe to restrict farming in the name of protecting water purity, with equally devastating results on agriculture. To prevent potential nitrate contamination of wells and other ground water features, rules have been imposed on manure management, and synthetic nitrogenous fertilizer applications in West Germany. In one German state, a “water penny” tax has been imposed to be applied to water safety work.

The European Community’s European Commission has designated “environmentally sensitive zones,” including water purity issues, throughout some of the prime farmland regions of Western Europe, such as the lush Po Valley in Italy. Rules have been drafted by the governments of the EC member nations, which specify how few cows, pigs, and other livestock per hectare (2.47 acres) a farmer may be allowed to keep in these designated regions, in order to prevent manure runoff. The proposals call for only 2 milk cows, 16 fattening hogs, or 5 sows per hectare.

One town in the Netherlands has gone so far in self-styled efforts to protect its ground water from perceived agricultural pollution, that officials set an 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew in which all cows must be herded indoors, to concentrate their droppings and prevent runoff. This laborious chore may well be the last financial straw for many farmers.

The scandal of all this is that there is no sweeping excess

levels of nitrates in ground water, on either side of the Atlantic. In fact, one of the leading dietary sources of nitrates is not ground water at all, or even processed meats, but raw vegetables—and especially organically grown ones—such as spinach, carrots, celery, and beets. As the 1976 paper by Dr. Thomas H. Jukes below details, the danger does not lie in nitrates as such, but the mechanism by which nitrates are converted into cancer-causing nitrosamines. This process is poorly understood, and its relation to dietary intake of nitrates is now totally obfuscated by the hysteria whipped up by the friends of William K. Reilly.

On the larger scale, the absence of food supplies caused by the menace of fanatic environmentalism on farmers, will result in millions of people needlessly suffering and dying from malnutrition and even starvation.

Nitrates and nitrites as components of the normal environment

by Thomas H. Jukes

Dr. Jukes presented the following speech to the Meat Industry Research Conference on March 25-26, 1976.

The existence of life as we know it is completely dependent upon nitrogen. In July 1976, the Viking Space vehicle is scheduled to land on the surface of Mars to conduct a search for living organisms and to carry out other scientific measurements. No human beings will be present, of course, and the information obtained by the instruments on Viking will be transmitted by radio back to Earth. So far, nitrogen has not been detected in the Martian atmosphere. Horowitz concludes that if there are no functional amounts of nitrogen on Mars, there will be no possibility of life on that planet. Theories of the origin of life always include amino acids as an essential component of even the most primitive forms of life. These ideas have been greatly stimulated by the detection of small amounts of amino acids in meteorites, carbonaceous chondrites from outer space. The role of nitrogen in the origin of life is discussed in the book by Miller and Orgel, *The Origins of Life of Earth*. The usual theory is that the