

Rosendale Dairy Creates new system to transport manure

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Odor. Noise. Traffic.

For neighbors of Rosendale Dairy, it's been like the trifecta of irritants.

But a new project at the 8,000-head dairy could lessen the impact of each of those issues.

Rosendale Dairy is building a series of pipelines to the south and west that will transport liquid manure to several of the larger, nearby fields on which it spreads manure.

The project could be a win-win proposal, as it would lessen the fuel costs the dairy is incurring to transport the manure today, while reducing the amount of traffic of the manure trucks leaving the dairy.

And as fewer trucks hit the roads, less noise and odor will result, according to the DNR.

"It's a real good thing for the neighbors," said Jim Ostrom, partner with the dairy's owner, Milksource.

But not all neighbors are ready to celebrate.

Harboring concerns that the pipelines could lead to manure spills — and thereby polluting the groundwater — neighbors continue to balk at the project.

"[Neighbor group] PEPL has many concerns, not the least of which is what's to prevent the dairy from maintaining a steady, constant flow of liquid manure from the pits through the pipes and onto the fields, day and night," said Elaine Swanson, the informal head of the PEPL group.

Yet the DNR supports the notion that, by the dairy using municipal-grade sewer pipe rather than trucks to move manure, neighbors actually will benefit.

"I think it's a lack of education sometimes," said Casey Jones, an Oshkosh-based wastewater specialist with the DNR, of why some neighbors are objecting.

Conditional approval for the project actually came in late August, when the DNR informed Rosendale Dairy management that they could move forward with the project.

Conditions included hiring an inspector to oversee the project and documentation demonstrating the project was done to specifications approved.

Work has been underway since, with completion expected Nov. 22.

When done, the dairy will have 10,778 feet of pipe ready to transport manure — which it refers to as "nutrients" — to neighboring fields.

Before they're used, though, the pipes will be inspected and pressure-tested to ensure they will not leak manure into the ground.

Ostrom said it borrowed the idea for such a pipe system from others in the industry.

"There are larger farms around the upper Midwest that are installing these," he said.

Jones concurred.

"There are quite a few dairies looking at doing this," she said, noting among those that already have installed them is Green Valley Dairy in Shawano County. "They have about 4,000 cows; a lot of others are looking into it."

should benefit neighbors

Jones said it's a mutually beneficial step — for dairy and neighbors — to put in such a system, "rather than transport it by semi truck.

"They are trying to reduce the traffic by [laying] pipes to some of the larger fields ... This allows them to pump it underground ... and directly hose it in."

She noted this can "appease some neighbors with [less] traffic and odor."

"This reduces traffic substantially," Ostrom said. "We will apply nutrients to fields that need fertilizer in a pretty quiet way."

Using the pipes will take 6,000 semi loads of manure off the roads — equaling 12,000 trips in or out of the dairy total each year.

Farmers could see benefits as well.

"There is a possibility of less compaction to the fields as we apply it," Ostrom said. "[So] it's good for the growers too."

Jones noted the work could help the dairy, meanwhile, by saving it on fuel costs.

Ostrom, though, somewhat disputed the notion of cost-savings.

“This is a pretty substantial [cost],” he said. “We want to invest in things that help the neighborhood.”

He believes, though, that the dairy could increase its reliance on piping manure in the future, but admits “we need to learn more about it” first.

some still concerned

Some neighbors, meanwhile, have called the DNR to complain about the project.

“One concern that came in was they were worried Rosendale Dairy would allow [the manure] to drain slowly and go into the groundwater,” Jones said.

Regardless of how it leaks out, Swanson noted it would be easy for manure to get to the groundwater.

“We’ve been hearing the sound of a back hoe hitting bedrock during this pipeline installation,” she said. “It is well known that fractured or distressed bedrock becomes vulnerable to surface pollutants reaching groundwater very quickly. In this case, liquid manure will be the huge threat.”

Bill Harke, communications specialist with Milksource, explained the dairy has every reason to do all it can not to allow manure to leak.

“We sell our manure,” he said. “It’s very valuable to the farmers and to us. We produce about 11,000 acres worth of fertilizer every year at the farm and have requests for about 20,000 acres worth.”

Others, Jones said, are concerned the pipes could leak.

She said this is not just unlikely, but nearly impossible to have happen.

“They are having it designed so they will know if anything is leaking,” Jones said, explaining the pipe is pressurized, making a leak immediately obvious. “And they will pressure-test it [to ensure the pipe won’t leak].”

Swanson, though, wasn’t concerned about the pipes leaking underground, as much as the hoses that attach above ground.

“Last summer, Rosendale Dairy was already using a flexible hose that originated from the manure pits and was laid on top of the field before passing under Olden Road via a culvert,” she said. “In time, a leak occurred in the hose causing a discharge into the ditch. What’s to prevent future accidents to similar flexible tubing extending across the fields?”

She also believes that scrutiny of the plans was rushed.

“By reviewing the plans Rosendale Dairy submitted, PEPL learned that ‘test pits were not required per discussions w/WDNR,’” Swanson said. “PEPL wonders why. Perhaps the answer is found in the Aug. 18, 2010 letter to Gordon Stevenson, [DNR] chief of watershed management, by Rosendale Dairy’s Dairy Business Consultant requesting an expedited review of Rosendale Dairy’s Manure Transfer Pipeline System. By Aug. 30, DNR issued its conditional approval of the plans and specifications ...”

Other concerns she noted included the placement of pipeline in areas where groundwater can rise to be within 12 inches of the surface, and some self-reporting of data to the DNR by the dairy.

Ostrom, though, is confident the new system not only will be safe, but actually will help neighbors. And he said the dairy will continue to find ways to improve the neighborhood.

“We continue to work toward improving the impact on neighbors,” he said, “and we have found a lot of positive support for it.”