

# Water Quality Update



## Dutch Yardsticks: A New Approach to Nutrient Management

Throughout the world, many farmers face the challenge of finding ways to farm profitably while protecting the environment. This is especially true in the Netherlands. The entire nation's drinking water supplies are at the surface or within a few yards of the surface, making water resources extremely vulnerable to contamination.

The Dutch have come up with a number of pollution control measures, including regulations on herd size, strict manure management laws, and innovative farm management tools called "yardsticks." The yardsticks are designed to help Dutch farmers first measure and then reduce the negative impacts on drinking water from nutrient runoff and leaching from farms.

Farmers use simple forms to keep track of nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) brought onto their farms in the form of feed, purchased fertilizer, nitrogen fixing crops, and livestock.

At the end of the season, the farmers determine the quantity of nutrients that were removed by way of marketed crops, livestock, milk, and other farm

products. The difference is considered the amount of nutrients "lost" to the environment.

### Mark your calendars!...

#### OK Section of the AWRA Quarterly Luncheon & One-day Workshop

GIS is becoming an increasingly important tool in water resource issues. Are you wondering what all the fuss is about? Here's your opportunity to learn more!

The Oklahoma Section of the American Water Resources Assoc. (AWRA) will be hosting their Quarterly Luncheon on December 10, 1996 on the OSU campus. Dr. Jayne M. Salisbury, Director of the Spatial and Environmental Clearinghouse (SEIC), is the featured luncheon speaker. She will be addressing "GIS and water resources."

AWRA in conjunction with SEIC is also sponsoring a workshop on "USGS DEM & Watershed Boundaries of OK." Learn about Digital Elevation Models (DEMs), and how to use the USGS watershed boundary DEMs. Both novice and GIS practitioner should find both events of interest.

Cost of the luncheon is \$12 and \$50 for the workshop. Deadline for registration is Dec. 4, 1996.

For further information contact: Anna Fallon (405)744-7532 or FAX: (405) 744-6059 or e-mail [fallon@agen.okstate.edu](mailto:fallon@agen.okstate.edu)

This nutrient balance sheet gives farmers baseline information needed to evaluate how their current farming practices are affecting the environment. Once a baseline is determined farmers can then make rational decisions about how to decrease fertilizer nutrient losses. Decisions about how much to reduce nutrient losses and how to accomplish their nutrient loss goals are made by the farmers.

The yardstick system of nutrient bookkeeping has now been in place in the Netherlands for six years, with remarkable results. The yardstick has helped Dutch farmers to cut costs by identifying unnecessary inputs, while at the same time reducing nutrient losses to the environment. The farmers praise it for its simplicity and for the independence it gives them in making nutrient management decisions.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) in

Minneapolis, MN, has begun adapting the nutrient management yardstick for use in the U.S. and is planning to introduce it in selected areas in late

1996. Agencies or individuals who are interested in learning about pilot projects should contact IATP.♦

*For further information contact: Mark Ritchie, Emily Green, or Jim Kleinshmit at the Institute for*

*Agriculture Trade Policy Tel: (612) 379-5980  
Fax: (612) 379-5982 email: water@mtn.org*

*⇒ NWQEP Notes, Sept., 1996, No. 79*

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## **Smart Questions About Protecting the Environment**

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*Smart Questions about Protecting the Environment* is the title of a newly released Cooperative Extension Service leaflet. This compact and informative document is aimed at answering common environmental questions posed by rural residents. It is in an easy to read question and answer format which covers the following topics:

- What should I do about old pesticides, chemicals, cleaning products, etc.?
- How often should my septic system be checked?
- Are there better ways to use pesticides?
- Is bare soil a problem on my land?
- Do local conditions call for extra care when using fertilizer?
- What should I do with waste oil or antifreeze?
- Are my fuel storage tanks a hazard?
- Is my water well safe?
- Is there any harm in letting my cattle wade in ponds and creeks?
- Is burning trash or having my own trash dump o.k.?
- Am I handling and applying animal manure properly?

Contact University Mailing Services at (405) 744-5385 and ask for L-283 for copies. (N.B. county offices should have received copies.)

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## **Hardship Grants Available for Disadvantaged Communities**

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently announced plans for a new grant program designed to help disadvantaged rural communities address their wastewater treatment needs.

The 1996 Congressional Appropriations Act reserved \$50 million for state revolving fund (SRF) appropriations to start the new Hardship Grants Program for Rural Communities.

EPA realizes that many small rural communities have outdated or failing wastewater treatment systems and often lack the resources to improve service. Under the proposed program, EPA will award grants to states that in turn will offer assistance to qualifying disadvantaged communities.

Any rural community with fewer than 3,000 residents can qualify for assistance if:

- its per capita income rate is lower than the national average,
- its unemployment rate exceeds the national average by one percentage point or more,
- the proposed project will improve public health and reduce environmental risk and,
- without the assistance, the project would be unaffordable under established criteria.

EPA plans to make revisions and have a finalized version of the program guidelines prepared by late 1996.

Guidelines can be found at  
<http://www.epa.gov./OW/hardship.html>.

*For more information contact Stephanie von Feck at U.S. EPA Mail Code 4204, 401 M St. SW, Washington, DC 20460.♦*

*⇒ adapted from *Small Flows*, Vol. 10(4)  
Fall, 1996*

If you need a copy of any articles, contact Hannah Barbara Fulton at (405) 744-5653

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