Do You Need to Report Your Water Use?

Michigan has laws aimed at protecting water without impeding dairy producers’ rights to use water. One component of this effort requires anyone with the ability to pump 70 gallons or more per minute to report their use. Large capacity pumps registered prior to February 1 will be assumed to not cause an adverse resource impact. This article summarizes what dairy producers should know about reporting water use and offers some tools for doing so effectively.

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Water—some people have it and some do not. We are fortunate that the Great Lakes region has an abundance of this life giving resource. With that abundance, however, issues arose that caused concern and dissention in the populace. Industries and special interest groups debated the best use of our water resources and ways to protect it. State and provincial governments got involved and entered into compacts that will ensure that everyone who uses the water will get a voice in decisions about water use. Laws were enacted that will protect the water but not relinquish industries’ or citizens’ rights to use the water. This is a brief look at water reporting legislation.

Annual Water Use Reporting

Public Act 148 of 2004 requires that all water users who have the capacity to pump 70 gallons or more per minute (100,000 gal/day) from one site or a combination of sites from ground or surface water must report their annual usage per pump. Agricultural water users report to the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) while all other users must report to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). Dairy farms that have a well that services residences as well as farm facilities can subtract domestic use from their pump capacity to determine if they need to report.

The information that is on the water use report has changed little since the law was enacted. Pump ID, county, township, whether it is a surface or groundwater withdrawal, pump’s rate of capacity, and latitude and longitude coordinates of the pump within 25 feet must be reported. It is extremely important that latitude and longitude be recorded for each pump. Public Act 185 of 2008 requires that all new large capacity withdrawals use a Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool. In order for the tool to have accurate data it must have the exact location of the well within the watershed. The model uses latitude and longitude coordinates to determine existing uses.

The water usage for each pump must be reported by month. Water use for irrigation can be reported as acre-inches.
or gallons. A fact sheet and Excel spreadsheet have been developed that will help dairy producers determine how much water they use for watering cattle; clean-up of the milking equipment, bulk tank and parlor; milk-precooling and miscellaneous tasks. You can access these tools at <http://www.mdr.msu.edu> or by contacting your Extension Dairy Educator.

The annual water use reporting form also includes a page for indicating which conservation practices are used on the farm. Producers need to check the box(es) for those practices that they use.

MDA compiles the annual water use information by townships and by latitude and longitude coordinates, not by farm, and sends it to MDEQ. MDEQ then compiles all water uses by township. This information can be obtained from the Groundwater Mapping website, <http://gwmap.rsgis.msu.edu>.

Registering Pumps

Farms that should have reported in the past but have not need to register their pump(s) by February 1, 2009 to ensure that their water use is compiled in the Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool. It is assumed that those pumps that are in use prior to February 1, 2009 are not causing an adverse environmental impact. To register a pump, download a new water withdrawal registration form from the MDA website, <http://www.michigan.gov/mda>, under Water Use Reporting (Reporting Form box). By registering the pump(s) used on your farm, you are not reporting your annual water use but simply stating that you have a large capacity pump or combination of pumps with a large capacity. You still will need to report your 2008 annual water use by April 1, 2009. If you are registering a new pump you will need to download a water reporting form from the MDA website. After this year MDA will send you a form at the end of each year.

For more information on water use reporting or registering a pump contact your local MSU Extension office, Groundwater Technician, or Abigail Eaton 517-241-3933, eatona@michigan.gov.