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news release

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EVES GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS WITH NEW DIRECTION ON NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

TORONTO - As a result of recently-held public consultations, the Ernie Eves government has made changes to proposed regulations under the Nutrient Management Act that will ensure the long-term competitiveness of Ontario's agri-food industry and protect the environment, Minister of Agriculture and Food Helen Johns said today.

The changes include simplifying proposed regulations and applying it initially to new and expanding large livestock farms. Existing large livestock farms would be covered by regulations in 2005. Other farms would not be covered until 2008 at the earliest, depending on recommendations from a provincial advisory committee and the availability of cost-shared funding.

"This balanced approach demonstrates that we listened to what people were saying," Johns said. "Thanks to the input we received, the proposed regulations will be clearer and more flexible for farmers, allowing them to invest with confidence in their operations while protecting the environment."

The proposed regulations will outline a number of key requirements to ensure environmental protection, including the preparation of nutrient management plans and strategies, restrictions on land application of nutrients, and minimum setback distances from municipal wells and surface water.

"This government is committed to ensuring clean, safe drinking water. Our comprehensive clean water strategy includes strong legislation and regulations that will protect our drinking water," said Stockwell. "The nutrient management framework will become a key part of the water protection approach envisioned by Commissioner Dennis O'Connor. We have worked with all our partners to ensure that the regulations are workable, well understood and fulfill this government's vow to protect the environment."

Other new directions include:

- Making July 1, 2003 the implementation date of the proposed regulations for all new livestock farms and those expanding into and within the large category.
- Setting up a provincial advisory committee that would provide recommendations to the government regarding specific nutrient management issues.
- Tying the implementation dates for any future regulations regarding all operations, other than for new and expanding livestock farms to the availability of cost-shared funding.
- Establishing a protocol whereby the Ministry of the Environment would have the ultimate authority to ensure compliance with the regulations through investigations and enforcement.
- Ensuring that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food would be the first point of contact for on-farm nutrient management issues, including monitoring.

"Farmers have, for years, voluntarily used environmentally responsible practices, and the government will continue to encourage them to do so," Johns said. "We're concentrating first on regulating the priority areas that people told us were important."

The government held 14 consultation meetings and 15 information sessions between November and February across the province on the stage two draft regulations. These meetings covered several areas, including mandatory nutrient management strategies and plans; the construction and siting of barns;

training and certification for those involved in nutrient management plans and strategies and winter spreading.

Consultations were also held earlier on stage one draft regulations, which dealt with the content requirements of nutrient management plans, and the categories of livestock operations that would be required to prepare these plans.

BACKGROUND

NEW DIRECTION ON NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

The Nutrient Management Act received Royal Assent on June 27, 2002. A series of consultations began in August, 2002 to collect input from a variety of stakeholders on draft regulations under the act.

Thirty-four information sessions and public consultation meetings were held across the province over the fall and winter. They were conducted in two stages, covering two sets of draft regulations. Hundreds of stakeholders attended and/or participated in the proceedings and Ministers Johns and Stockwell hosted many of them. The ministers also discussed the draft regulations at many other meetings with farm organizations, commodity groups and stakeholder organizations. More than 500 written submissions were received, including those under the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry.

As a result of this input, several changes are being proposed to the government's approach to nutrient management in the province. The changes would provide farmers with greater flexibility to comply with standards and maintain the government's key water and environmental protection objectives

The government is proposing to make the following changes regarding the implementation of the regulations under the Nutrient Management Act:

- Making July 1, 2003 the implementation date of the proposed regulations for all new livestock farms and those expanding into and within the large category (more than 300 Nutrient Units). A nutrient unit is the amount of manure that gives the fertilizer replacement value of the lower of 43 kg (95 pounds) of nitrogen or 55 kg (121 pounds) of phosphate.
- Making 2005 the implementation date for existing large livestock farms (more than 300 Nutrient Units).
- Setting up a provincial advisory committee. It would provide recommendations to the government regarding nutrient management issues. The committee would include farmers, environmental scientists, municipal representatives and others.
- Some of the issues that would be referred to this committee for further examination and recommendations are:
 - when the proposed regulations would apply to all types of farms except new livestock farms, large livestock farms and those expanding into the large livestock category
 - restrictions regarding the siting and construction of nutrient storage, as well as manure handling and application near municipal wells
 - seasonal outdoor feeding area standards
 - manure storage issues for existing operations
 - decommissioning of manure storages
 - nutrient application on tile-drained land
 - nutrient application on shallow soils
 - odour-related setbacks and standards
 - winter spreading restrictions for nutrients from the pulp and paper sector
- Tying the implementation dates of any future regulations, other than for new and expanding livestock farms, to the availability of cost-shared funding.
- A protocol would be established whereby the Ministry of the Environment would have the ultimate authority to ensure compliance with the regulations through investigations and enforcement.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Food would be the first point of contact for on-farm nutrient management issues, including monitoring.

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- 30 -

[Return to Index](#) | [version française disponible](#) | [Top of Page](#)
| [Information & Resources Home Page](#) |

[Central Site](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Search](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Français](#) |
[Home](#) | [What's New](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Products](#) | [News Releases](#) |



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