

# How Does Ecology Work with Non-dairy Livestock?

There are thousands of individual livestock operations in Washington state. An operation may be just a few horses or it could be a thousand head of beef cattle. Most of these operations pose no threat to Washington streams, rivers, and lakes. However, some operations do cause pollution. In almost all of these cases the producer is not knowingly polluting, but instead raising livestock in the same way the operation has done for a long time. As a result, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) endeavors to work with livestock in a unique, proactive way. Here is what we do:

**Support the operation** – Livestock production is an important industry in Washington state. Ecology’s approach is to prevent a livestock operation from suffering financially. We offer technical and financial assistance that not only protects water quality but also can enhance an operation’s economic vitality. Many producers report their operation is more successful once they implement best management practices (BMPs) for water quality.

**Partner for success** – Ecology partners with many local conservation districts to implement BMPs that benefit producers and prevent water pollution. Conservation district staff can provide technical assistance and be a non-regulatory bridge between Ecology and the producer. Conservation districts can also explain the steps needed to achieve compliance to producers.

**Provide outreach** – Before addressing livestock-related water quality issues in a watershed, Ecology shares information about water quality and livestock using a variety of outreach tools. These include town meetings, watershed workshops, CD mailings, news articles, and Ecology publications. An important message we convey is the benefit protecting water

### WHY IT MATTERS

Washington state water quality data and studies mirror national reports that indicate that pollution from agricultural lands is a significant source of impairments.

Agriculture is one of the top land uses adjacent to the more than 2,100 segments of waters that are currently on our state’s list of polluted waters for bacteria.

In Western Washington, commercial shellfish operations can be shut down repeatedly due to bacterial contamination. This is currently true of shellfish operations in the Samish River watershed.

In Eastern Washington, nitrate pollution threatens drinking water supplies in the lower Yakima basin.

### For more information:

Center for Natural Resource Policy, “Washington’s Agricultural Industry and Water Quality” paper:  
<http://www.cnrp.org/agqual.htm>

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### Special accommodations

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quality has on an operation's bottom line. Reducing mud in confinement and calving areas, providing clean stock water in strategic locations, and initiating grazing management strategies are a few ways to protect water and benefit the operation.

**Identify sites for BMPs (Best Management Practices)** – A good amount of research has been done locally and around the country documenting harm livestock can bring to surface water. Ecology works with conservation districts and livestock owners to identify sites where management changes can help. These changes come from criteria developed from research and extensive field experience. The need for BMPs is not based on the presence of livestock. It is based on the presence of livestock impacts. When we evaluate watersheds we often encourage the local conservation district to come along. It allows us to discuss the best way to provide help at each unique site.

**Offer help** – In nearly all situations, a conservation district and/or Ecology first contacts a producer to offer help. In either case, we try to meet with producers to develop site-specific plans that protect surface water and use available state and federal funding. Ecology can fund crews that provide labor to construct fence, install stock tanks, build livestock crossings, or provide other help the producer needs as part of a plan to protect water quality.

**Utilize cost-share** – Ecology works to get grant funds into the hands of local conservation districts so they can help livestock producers when we identify water quality concerns. Millions in state grant dollars have been directed toward non-dairy livestock producers. During the 2009-11 biennium, Ecology was authorized to offer nearly \$10 million in grant funding to local governments, conservation districts, tribes, and private not-for-profit organizations. Nearly 40 percent of that - \$3.8 million – supports the work of conservation districts. Furthermore, Ecology encourages and supports adoption of federal cost-share programs that fund BMPs. In most cases, virtually all of the expenses of BMP implementation can be offered.

**Use compliance tools as a last resort** – We rarely need to use our enforcement tools. Most problems can be addressed by Ecology and producers working together. A producer usually is provided multiple opportunities for help. But, under the Clean Water Act, Ecology is ultimately responsible to ensure the streams and rivers in Washington state are protected. When it becomes clear that the water quality problem cannot be addressed through financial and technical assistance, Ecology uses a combination of multiple site visits, complaints, photographs, water samples, and extensive scientific research to demonstrate verifiable threats to water quality.