

SHODDY SHOWCASE

Water is widely recognized as a precious resource in Lititz Borough in Lancaster County. The people of Lititz get their drinking water from the abundant groundwater under their feet. The water is pumped from six wells that sit inside a scientifically identified, mapped and officially recognized wellhead protection area that encompasses the northern half of the borough and extends northeast into the farmland in Penn and Warwick townships.

Lititz Run, rising at Lititz Spring Park in the heart of the borough, is fed by the same large limestone aquifer that supplies the drinking water and has been the subject of an intense restoration effort that has received recognition by the Environmental Protection Agency as one of twelve National Showcase Watersheds. The effort has been supported by at least \$880,000 in federal and state grants and involves an active partnership of county and local governments, state and federal agencies, the Warwick School District, Millersville University, businesses and private environmental, conservation and civic organizations.

So, one would think that a 3,000 head sow operation that houses another 3,000 younger pigs with its manure pits and waste lagoons located smack dab in the middle of the wellhead protection area and the watershed for the Lititz Run would be built with the greatest care. One would also assume that it would have received the closest scrutiny during the permitting process by regulators to ensure that its manure pits and lagoons would not pollute the groundwater or the stream. It would seem to be an opportunity to showcase how industrial-scale livestock operations can be safely located in a sensitive watershed.

Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be the case at the Rohrer farm just outside of Lititz. According to published reports, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) was informed that the pits may not be built to standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). A picture published in the *Lancaster Intelligencer* shows a wall of one of the pits collapsed, apparently damaged during construction. And the newspaper says it is in possession of other photos which show cracked mortar seams.

How did this come about? In 2003 Dale Rohrer decided to expand his existing swine operation and contract with Country View Family Farms to operate the facility. Country View Family Farms is a subsidiary of Hatfield Quality Meats and operates 148 swine farms in 22 Pennsylvania counties.

When Country View contracts with farmers, it is usually the farmers themselves who pay for the construction of hog barns and associated infrastructure such as manure storage facilities. This may require a farmer to make a major investment of upwards of several million dollars. The farmer is responsible for ensuring that the facilities are constructed to meet all legal requirements. Country View supplies the hogs and the feed and manages the daily operation and pays the farmer a set price for each pig produced.

At these large, industrialized hog farms, the barns are built over pits that receive the manure produced by the pigs. The manure is mixed with the water used to wash down the barns. At the Rohrer facility there are three of these barns over pits capable of storing 200,000 gallons of manure. State law requires pits such as these to be built according to specifications laid out by the NRCS, certified by an engineer as structurally sound, and permitted by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). At the Rohrer Lexington Road facility, the pits hold the manure for a couple of days, then the solids are separated out and the liquid flows into two lagoons. Each manure storage structure - the pits, the solids separator, and the lagoons should be permitted according to state law.

A recent review of the DEP file on this facility conducted by PennFuture revealed that neither the pits nor the solids separator have the proper permits. We went public with our findings, and this week DEP informed Dale Rohrer that he must apply for a water quality permit by January 31, 2006.

The requirement for operators of industrial-scale livestock operations to obtain permits is more than just an exercise in paper-pushing. It is designed to ensure, among other environmental protections, that the manure structures associated with the facility are soundly built so that they do not leak and pollute the water. This is particularly important, given the Rohrer farm's location in the wellhead protection area of the Lititz water supply.

If the Rohrer facility is unable to meet the permit requirements, bringing it up to standards will probably be very costly. It would appear that the construction of the manure storage and its potential to leak into the groundwater may threaten the drinking water supply for Lititz and the water quality of Lititz Run. This should not be allowed to happen in any watershed, let alone in the showcase Lititz Run watershed.

The staff and board of PennFuture wish all of our readers a happy holiday season and a clean and green New Year.