

Point of View: **Dairy Farmer**

Lesson 15

Examining a Real Environmental Problem

Resource: Ecosystems Teachers Guide Pgs.160–172



A Dairy Farmer's Point of View Sheet

Dairy farmers make their living by raising and caring for the dairy cattle that produce milk. The milk, cheese, ice cream, and other milk products we enjoy and depend on come from these farms.

After reading this selection, take the point of view of a dairy farmer as you discuss these questions:

- How do dairy farms create problems in Puget Sound?
- How could you help solve these problems?
- Which solutions would be difficult to live with?
- What benefits will you gain from a healthier Puget Sound?



A Dairy Farmer's Viewpoint

A farm is a great place to live, but there is always a lot of hard work and often not much profit. Cows must be milked early in the morning and again at night. They have to be fed and watered each day and tended when they are sick. Dairy farmers must also raise many acres of feed for the cows while also managing the business of selling milk. Farm machinery is expensive to buy and must be repaired and maintained. Income from selling the milk depends on prices that may drop lower than the cost of producing the milk.

One of the dairy farmer's biggest problems is managing manure. One cow can produce 100 pounds of manure each day. It makes good fertilizer for the crops, but often there is more manure than a farmer can use each year. There is so much manure that farmers must use bulldozers to move it into huge storage tanks. The manure must be pumped out of the tanks into trucks and then spread on the fields. The equipment used to do this is very expensive.

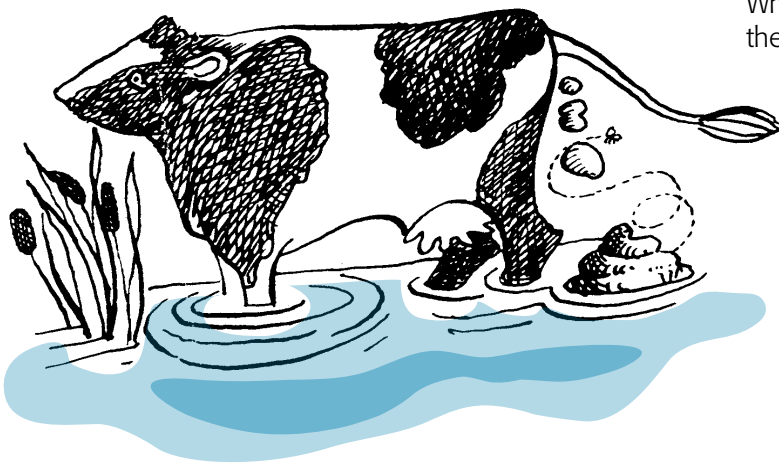




Dairy Farmers Can Affect Puget Sound

Dairy farmers can cause the following problems for Puget Sound:

- Cow manure is a great fertilizer, but when it gets into streams and rivers that drain into Puget Sound, it causes algae blooms. Algae can use so much oxygen as it grows that it leaves no oxygen in the water for fish, so they die.
- Cows need a lot of food. In order to grow it quickly, dairy farmers often use chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These chemicals often get into Puget Sound where they contaminate water and kill aquatic wildlife.
- As cows walk in streams to drink, they break down the streambank. Soil loosens and falls into the water where it gets washed downstream to Puget Sound. This sediment carries bacteria and other contaminants into the clam and oyster beds around the Sound.
- Farmers and their families do all the same things that everyone else does. They drive cars and trucks, produce garbage and sewage, and use electricity. All these things produce pollution that eventually reaches Puget Sound.



How Can Dairy Farmers Help Puget Sound?

Here are some things dairy farmers can do to help the Sound:

- Store manure in concrete or steel pits that are leak proof. Spread the manure on dry days when rain will not cause manure runoff.
- Limit the number of cows you own to be sure you do not have more manure available than you can use as fertilizer.
- Move cows from pasture to pasture so they do not destroy all the plant life in one area. Bare land erodes easily.
- Build fences to keep cows out of streams.



Changes and Tradeoffs

Changes can be difficult when you have done things the same way for a long time. As you read about what dairy farmers can change to help protect Puget Sound, think about these questions:

How are these changes good for Puget Sound?
What are the tradeoffs for a dairy farmer who makes these changes?



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