

The Register-Guard

NEWS

Should Oregon regulate dairy air pollution? DEQ is seeking public input



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Salem Statesman Journal

Published 2:41 p.m. PT Oct. 5, 2022 | Updated 4:36 p.m. PT Oct. 5, 2022

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is asking the public to weigh in on whether the state should begin regulating air pollution from large dairies.

In August, a coalition of 22 advocacy groups filed a petition for rulemaking with the state. They're asking DEQ to declare large dairies sources of air pollution, just like factories.

Recent research from the lead petitioner, Food & Water Watch, found Oregon's megadairies collectively release more than 17 million kilograms of methane each year, equivalent to the emissions from 318,000 cars.

Large dairies, or confined animal feeding operations, also emit ammonia, hydrogen sulfide and particulate matter, all of which can cause health problems in people.

DEQ will accept written comments on the petition until 4 p.m. Oct. 23.

To submit comments, go to oregon.gov/deq/rulemaking/Pages/DairyAirPetition.aspx or email DairyAir.Petition@deq.oregon.gov.

The state Environmental Quality Commission, which advises DEQ, plans to act on the petition at a special meeting to be scheduled before a Nov. 15 deadline to respond. The EQC could deny the petition, grant the petition and begin rulemaking, or choose to do something else.

Rules would apply to about 37 large dairies

The proposed rule submitted by the groups is similar to the recommendation from a 2008 legislative task force on dairy air emissions, Emily Miller, the Food & Water Watch lawyer who was the lead author of the petition, said during a media briefing Wednesday.

“Their recommendations strongly urged the state to take immediate action to address this issue,” Miller said. “The state has done little to nothing to regulate this industry.”

The proposed regulations would apply to dairies with 700 or more mature cows, or about 37 of the state’s 230 dairies. Those large dairies house about 56% of the state’s dairy cows.

New dairies, as well as dairy expansions or modifications, would need to obtain an air quality permit before beginning construction. Existing dairies would have one year to obtain a permit.

Permits would require that, if certain emissions were exceeded, the dairy would have to take steps to achieve reductions.

Those could include things like keeping manure in dry, solid form rather than liquifying it; covering manure lagoons and treating vented air with a biofilter; applying liquid manure to fields with a low, rather than high pressure system; or creating natural windbreaks around production areas and lagoons.

Emissions from large industrial dairies are impacting the health of their employees and families, who must live nearby, Ubaldo Hernández, senior community organizer at Columbia Riverkeeper, said at the briefing.

“A lot of people, because they depend on these jobs, they are afraid to speak up,” Hernández said. “A lot of these kids have chronic problems because of constant exposure to these contaminants.”

In Morrow and Umatilla counties, the Boardman and Hermiston areas are home to the state’s largest dairies, with a collective 100,000 cows.

There are six dairies in Marion County that could be subject to the proposed rules: Dejager Dairy, AJ Dairy, Hesse & Sons Dairy, Platt’s Turner Dairy, BSP and Hazenberg Dairy.

There are three in Polk County: Diamond Valley Dairy, Platt’s Oak Hill Dairy and Rickreall Dairy.

And there are two in Lane County: Lochmead Farms and Brownsville Calf Ranch.

The groups that signed on to the petition represent environmental, public health, sustainable agriculture, animal welfare and community interests.

They are: 350 Eugene, 350 Deschutes, Animal Legal Defense Fund, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Beyond Toxics, Center for Biological Diversity, Center for

Food Safety, Columbia Riverkeeper, Comunidades Amplifying Voices for Environmental and Social Justice, Environment Oregon, Humane Voters Oregon, Farm Forward, Farm Sanctuary, Food & Water Watch, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Friends of Family Farmers, Mercy for Animals, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, Pendleton Community Action Alliance, Public Justice Foundation and World Animal Protection.

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