

# Dairy wants whey to be used for irrigation

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Island Farms is applying to the B.C. Ministry of Environment for a permit to dispose of several thousand tonnes a year of liquid whey, a cottage cheese byproduct, at two North Saanich farms.

Notice to the public required under the Environmental Management Act says the liquid is "basically milk without the proteins and fat."

The liquid waste would go to Pendray Farms on West Saanich Road and Brackenhurst Farms on Wain Road, and would be sprayed on their fields as needed.

Trucks would take the substance to the farms four days a week, Monday and Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, according to the cottage cheese production schedule at the dairy.

It would go into the farms' manure pits for storage until needed to irrigate crops. The whey-manure mix would be sprayed year-round, said Dairy general manager Greg Martin.

"This isn't unique in the industry. This has been done before," he said Tuesday.

Often dairies send whey to pig farms as animal feed, but there isn't a hog operation big enough here, he said.

Using whey to irrigate farm pastures will reduce water usage at those farms. Now, the whey goes into the sewers.

Island Farms won a 2004 EcoStar award from the Capital Regional District in drinking water stewardship conservation, for several other initiatives at its Dowler Place dairy manufacturing plant that cut

its annual water use by 30,000 cubic metres.

"This is another initiative to reduce water usage," he said.

At maximum cottage cheese production, the farms would share 5,616 cubic metres a year of whey. A third of it is tap water used to cool the cottage cheese curds.

Martin said the daily production of whey and waste water would fill a tanker truck and small trailer tank a day.

Aside from the starter used to initiate coagulation of the milk solids into curds, the process doesn't use any preservatives or additives, according to the notice.

Using whey on farmland would, in fact, add desirable trace elements to the soil, Martin said.

Anyone who "may be adversely affected" by the plan has 30 days to send their written comments to Island Farms and the ministry's regional waste manager in Nanaimo.

Martin said the dairy hopes to start sending its whey to the two farms "as soon as we get the appropriate approvals."