



Wisconsin Farm Technology Days 2007 – Green County

NEWS RELEASE

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Free well water testing and water information at Farm Technology Days

Madison – All visitors at Farm Technology Days, Sept. 18-20 in Green County, will have the chance to test their well water for nitrate, the most common health-related contaminant found in Wisconsin's groundwater. University of Wisconsin-Extension will offer the free on-the-spot test, and it will only take a few minutes to get the results.

If you would like to take advantage of this free and easy water testing, please bring one pint of water in a clean container to the Progress Pavilion. While you're there, you can visit other educational displays and ask questions regarding topics such as drinking water and health, water treatment options and water conservation provided by UW-Extension, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Department of Health and Family Services and Department of Commerce.

In 2006, over 250 nitrate screens were performed on water samples from 27 Wisconsin counties during the three-day show in Sheboygan County. Eighteen percent of the samples showed unsafe nitrate levels, nitrate-nitrogen greater than 10 milligrams per liter. The average nitrate-nitrogen value found was 5 milligrams per liter, and the highest was 29 milligrams per liter, nearly three times the drinking water standard.

“High levels of nitrate in drinking water have been linked to “blue baby” syndrome in infants less than six months of age,” said Kevin Masarik, UW-Extension groundwater education specialist. Women who are trying to conceive or who are pregnant should not drink water with high levels of nitrate because some researchers believe this increases the risk of birth defects and miscarriages.

“Although the risks are greatest for small children and pregnant women, everyone should be concerned about elevated nitrate levels,” Masarik said. While nitrate occurs naturally at very low levels, the elevated levels found throughout much of Wisconsin indicate that human activities are having an impact on groundwater quality and may be an indication of other contaminants as well.

Crop and lawn fertilizers, manure storage and spreading, septic systems and feed lots can all have a sizable impact on nitrate levels in our groundwater.

In Wisconsin, about one out of every 10 private wells may contain unsafe levels of nitrate. Because water quality can change over time, private well owners are encouraged to have a nitrate and bacteria test performed each year to determine if their water is safe to drink. Specialists at the display can also assist in deciding what other tests well owners may want to consider to determine the safety of their water supply. Don't pass up the opportunity to take part in this educational opportunity.

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