

## MUNICIPAL SPRAYING NEWS



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## Researchers Seek Halt To Nitrate Contamination

Cornell University researchers in Ithaca, N.Y., are attempting to halt the buildup of groundwater nitrates in the eastern part of Long Island in a major effort to avoid contamination of drinking water.

They are taking a critical look at nitrogen fertilization of potatoes and of turfgrasses on sod farms, home lawns, golf courses, parks and other lawn areas.

Their goal is to develop alternative fertilizer recommendations that will reduce nitrate leaching to acceptable levels without hurting crop yields and turfgrass quality.

Supported by a \$200,000 grant from the Suffolk County Department of Environmental Control, the study was spurred by recent findings that nitrate levels above 10 parts per million (which exceed the public health standard for drinking water) were observed in a number of wells in eastern Suffolk County.

Professor Jim L. Ozbun at the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell, who is directing the study, said the most likely sources of nitrate in groundwater are fertilized farm fields, domestic sewage from septic tanks and cesspools, and residential, institutional and recreational areas where turfgrasses are maintained.

Kenneth Rykbost, research associate with the College's Long Island Vegetable Research Farm in Riverhead, N.Y., is serving as coordinator of the project. Other researchers in the project are Professor John E. Kaufmann, turfgrass specialist; Professor David R. Boulding, agronomist; Professor Gilbert Levine, agricultural engineer; and Professor Stewart L. Dallyn and Senior Research Associate Anne Schippers, both vegetable crop specialists. Several graduate students are also participating in the project.

Before launching the project last summer, the Cornell researchers had conducted for several years a series of preliminary studies of the fertilizer practices for potato production.

The results have indicated that growers may be able to obtain satisfactory yields with less nitrogen than now used, although no conclusive

recommendations can be made at this stage, Ozbun said.

To improve the efficiency of nitrogen use, the Cornell researchers are concentrating on methods and timing of application. Chemical inhibitors that slow the transformation of nitrogen into leachable nitrate will be tested.

Kaufmann, who is responsible for turfgrass research in the project, is evaluating 40 different varieties of turfgrasses at the Riverhead research farm to see how they perform under low rates of nitrogen application.

Kaufmann pointed out that golf courses in the area generally apply from 170 to 260 pounds of nitrogen per acre (four to six pounds per 1,000 square feet). The rate for home lawns may be as high as 350 pounds per acre (eight pounds per 1,000 square feet).

"Those who apply six to eight pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn are using more nitrogen than necessary," Kaufmann said.

The Cornell researchers are preparing to set up a series of demonstration plots on selected farms and golf courses this year for farmers and non-farm people in the area.



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