

Community Assistance with CSI's *by Mary Beth Budz, Source Water Protection Specialist*

As many operators are already aware of, two components of the Source Water Protection plan are developing a contingency plan and completing the potential contaminant source inventory from the Department of Environmental Quality. For some operators, where resources are beyond thin already, this is usually a task that is set aside until they are pushed to do it by Health and Human Services or some other authoritative body. Well, help is on the way!!

Expounding upon an already tried and true method, FFA chapters are assisting the operators involved in a source water protection plan with the completion of the potential contaminant source inventory. In addition to completing the inventory forms, students can do the gps'ing and mapping of the potential contaminant locations and could provide continued long-term ground water monitoring to water operators. We are very excited about the addition of this new assistance where it is available. In areas where FFA Chapters do not exist, other viable and educational options such as 4-H clubs are being investigated as possible community assistance. So far, it seems to be a win-win situation on everybody's part: the operator gets some help on what otherwise might be an overwhelming task and the students are able to use what they learn and incorporate it into their Natural Resource curriculum.

As an added bonus for FFA students, the Lincoln/ Lancaster Health Department is offering and assisting the students in testing private wells for nitrates through a program known as Test-Your-Well. It is a confidential program. If a resident with a domestic well would like free nitrate testing, they can bring in a sample of well water at the Test-Your-Well event and the students will test it free of charge. While waiting for test results (about 5 to 8 minutes), participants answer several questions on water knowledge and use. Valuable information is gleaned from this survey tool. The Test –Your-Well event provides an excellent opportunity to disseminate information on conservation programs available to large landowners and general water education information to the public. It ties in nicely to the community aspect of the source water program and reaches an audience that otherwise might be unreachable. You might think of it as a groundwater festival for the general public.

Most FFA teachers are very supportive and excited about having a worthy project that involves their community since community service is a major focus of the FFA program. For some chapters, FFA students plan on using this educational opportunity as a forum for public speaking and are looking for opportunities to address the public. I'd say this is a great time to schedule them in front of your village boards/councils.

Some of the communities where the FFA partnerships have been successful are Wilber, Valparaiso and Syracuse. Possible future sites include Holdredge, Wisner/Pilger and West Point. The Department of Education agrees that it fits in nicely with the Ag curriculum and supports the use of the students in our work goals.

For questions or for further information, please contact me at the NeRWA office.