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Cooling Ponds Pass Hurdle

Cooling ponds passed another hurdle at the National Conference on Interstate Milk Shipments. Texas Cooperative Extension worked with the Texas Department of Health and Dairy Farmers of America to develop a proposal to amend the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO) to specifically allow cooling ponds as a method to cool cows. A revision of this proposal was passed at the National Conference on Interstate Milk Shipment held in Seattle, Washington at the end of April.

The use of cooling ponds became an issue about two years ago when an FDA regional milk inspector saw one on a Texas dairy and debited the dairy for having it. The PMO indicates no standing water is allowed in cowyards, and he considered the cooling pond standing water. The Texas Department of Health at first indicated that cooling ponds should be shut down. Cooling ponds had been used in Florida for nearly 20 years, but were first introduced into Texas about five years ago.

At Texas A&M we were able to obtain somatic cell count information and bacteriological data on bulk tanks which indicated no adverse impact of cooling ponds on milk quality or milk safety. After reviewing the data and hearing from producers and industry groups, the Texas Department of Health reversed their initial decision to close down the ponds last spring and decided to work with industry to try and get the PMO changed to allow the cooling ponds.

The amendment to the PMO to allow cooling ponds has one more hurdle. All changes passed at the conference must be submitted to FDA by mid-June. Then FDA has 90 days to accept or reject the proposed changes, thus final approval of the amendment won't actually occur until September.

During the course of our research, we evaluated Texas DHI records from all the herds with and without cooling ponds in the Windthorst area. From that data set we estimate that cows cooled with cooling ponds produced about 6 more pounds of milk/day in August and about 3.5 more pounds/day in June, July, Sept., and Oct. There are other means of cooling cows, but for those that choose cooling ponds, they do work without adversely affecting milk quality or milk safety as we measured it.

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