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*"Connecting Cows, Cooperatives, Capitol Hill, and Consumers"*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **EPA Withdraws Water Guidance as Result of NMPF Objections**

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA – As the result of objections raised by the National Milk Producers Federation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has withdrawn a regulatory guidance issued last year concerning when farmers must seek Clean Water Act permits for a long list of normal farming activities near wetlands.

On Friday, January 29, the EPA and the U.S. Department of Army signed a [memorandum](#) withdrawing the "Interpretive Rule Regarding the Applicability of Clean Water Act Section 404(f)(1)(A)." Last summer, [NMPF requested](#) that the Interpretive Rule be withdrawn because it could have actually discouraged water conservation and environmental best practices.

"Our concern with the initial proposal from last year is that it could have altered the long-standing and productive relationship between farmers and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, in a way that would have made it harder for farmers to implement water conservation measures," said Jamie Jonker, NMPF's Vice President for Sustainability & Scientific Affairs.

"We're pleased the EPA and Army have recognized that this regulation could have backfired, and that they've taken the necessary step to withdraw it," Jonker said.

The EPA guidance, officially called an Interpretive Rule, was issued in March 2014. It said farmers are only exempt from needing Clean Water Act permits for more than 50 routine farming practices if they comply with detailed NRCS technical conservation standards. Historically, these standards have been voluntary, and the farming practices exempt from the permit process.

[In comments filed last July](#), NMPF said the guidance changes NRCS's role from that of a conservation partner to that of an enforcer of the Clean Water Act, on EPA's behalf.

Had the interpretive rule not been withdrawn, "the NRCS would have been thrust into the role of enforcer, rather than remaining a source from which farmers could seek conservation advice. This could have hindered rather than helped conservation efforts," he said.

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Jonker noted that NMPF has drawn up a [detailed environmental handbook](#) based on NRCS standards but tailored specifically to dairy farmers. Those who followed the guidelines in the book apparently would not have qualified for a permit exemption, “challenging the very notion of why the handbook was created in the first place,” Jonker added.

Established initially the 1930s, the NRCS provides voluntary help to farmers who want to conserve the resources on their farms.

The now-withdrawn Interpretive Rule was intended to be part of the larger Waters of the U.S. proposal issued last year by the EPA. The larger proposal is still under review by both EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers, and is also being scrutinized by Congress.

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The National Milk Producers Federation, based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well-being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF’s cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of more than 32,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. Visit [www.nmpf.org](http://www.nmpf.org) for more information.