

Winona County: Final Overview of Nitrate Levels in Private Wells (2016-2017)

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) determines current nitrate-nitrogen concentrations in private wells, on a township scale, through the Township Testing Program. The MDA has identified townships throughout the state that are vulnerable to groundwater contamination and have significant row crop production. The MDA plans to offer nitrate testing to more than 70,000 private well owners in over 300 townships by 2019.

Each selected township is offered testing in two steps, the “initial” sampling and the “follow-up” sampling. In the initial sampling, all township homeowners using private wells are sent a nitrate test kit. If nitrate is detected in their initial sample, the homeowner is offered a follow-up nitrate test, pesticide test and well site visit. Trained MDA staff visit willing homeowners to resample the well and then conduct a site assessment. The assessment helps to identify possible non-fertilizer sources of nitrate and to see the condition of the well. A well with construction problems may be more susceptible to contamination.

The MDA and Winona County Environmental Services worked together to select townships and implement the nitrate testing project. The following townships were selected: **Elba, Fremont, Hart, Hillsdale, Mt. Vernon, Norton, Pleasant Hill, St. Charles, Saratoga, Utica, Warren, Wilson, and Wiscoy**. The initial sampling in Winona County started in 2016 and follow-up sampling ended in 2017.

Results

Two datasets are used to evaluate nitrate. The initial well dataset contains 940* wells; the final dataset contains 731 wells. Wells that had nitrate-nitrogen results over 5 mg/L were removed from the initial dataset if a non-fertilizer source or well problem was identified, to form the final well dataset. A total of 209 wells (22%) were removed. The results from the initial and final well datasets are summarized in the table below.

In Fremont, Saint Charles, Utica, and Warren Townships, more than 10% of the wells were over the Health Risk Limit of 10 mg/L of nitrate-nitrogen (map below). The percent of wells over the Health Risk Limit in each township ranged from 0% to 42.9%. The Winona County Final Report will be available on the MDA website in 2018: www.mda.state.mn.us/townshiptesting.

Next steps

The MDA uses the final well dataset to determine if additional action is warranted, as described in the Minnesota Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan (NFMP). The MDA uses the assessment process and prioritization guidelines in the NFMP to determine next steps. Find more information about the NFMP on the MDA website at www.mda.state.mn.us/nfmp.

Funding Acknowledgement

Funding for this project is provided by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment



Table: Winona County Private Well Nitrate Results, 2018.

Township	Initial Well Dataset		Final Well Dataset	
	Total Wells*	Percent of Wells ≥ 10 mg/L Nitrate-Nitrogen	Total Wells	Percent of Wells ≥ 10 mg/L Nitrate-Nitrogen
Elba	62	16.1%	52	5.8%
Fremont	42	54.8%	28	42.9%
Hart	48	18.8%	31	6.5%
Hillsdale	52	1.9%	44	0.0%
Mt. Vernon	33	15.2%	24	0.0%
Norton	80	11.3%	62	4.8%
Pleasant Hill	58	8.6%	50	4.0%
St. Charles	85	34.1%	62	14.5%
Saratoga	56	19.6%	40	5.0%
Utica	86	46.5%	51	19.6%
Warren	92	28.3%	62	11.3%
Wilson	196	6.1%	179	1.7%
Wiscoy	50	0.0%	46	0.0%
Total	940	19.1%	731	7.1%

* All well types included.

Figure: Winona County Final Well Dataset Map, 2018.

