

Chapter 29

Agriculture—Regulating Livestock Waste

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By April 2017, the Ministry of Agriculture made good progress in addressing the one outstanding recommendation we initially made in 2013 related to our audit of the processes to regulate livestock waste. It reviewed and confirmed the existence and operational status of intensive livestock operations that it had permitted for operations before 1996 (pre-1996). It was working to have non-compliant operations implement sufficient controls to protect water resources. However, site inspections are still required to verify the compliance of the remaining 7% of intensive livestock operations confirmed to be operating.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry is responsible for administering the intensive livestock provisions under *The Agricultural Operations Act* and regulations to ensure intensive livestock operations store and manage livestock waste in a manner that protects water resources.

Our *2013 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 28 concluded that the Ministry had effective processes to regulate waste generated from livestock operations, except for a few areas. We made three recommendations.

Our first follow-up concluded, by July 15, 2015, the Ministry had implemented two of the three recommendations, and partially implemented the remaining one.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance*. To evaluate the Ministry's progress towards meeting our recommendation, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Ministry's management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

We interviewed Ministry staff responsible for livestock waste regulation and discussed the actions taken to address the recommendation. We also obtained, reviewed and assessed the adequacy of documentation on the work being done to implement the outstanding recommendation.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This section sets out the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at April 30, 2017, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.



3.1 Good Progress Made in Regulating Pre-1996 Intensive Livestock Operations

We recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture confirm that intensive livestock operations, that it approved prior to 1996, have sufficient controls to protect water resources. (2013 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement November 26, 2014)

Status – Partially Implemented

While the Ministry has made good progress in reviewing and confirming that pre-1996 intensive livestock operations have sufficient controls to protect water resources, it had not verified the compliance of 7% of those operations with approved permits, and was working with another 17% to have them comply with approved permits.

At April 2017, it identified 812 farms with one or more valid pre-1996 approvals, and confirmed 331 intensive livestock operations with a pre-1996 approval were operating.

At April 2017, 927 pre-1996 approvals had been cancelled. Approvals are cancelled when plans have changed and a new approval is issued or when operations have ceased and the owners do not have plans to potentially operate the intensive livestock operation again.

The Ministry's regional staff worked with non-compliant pre-1996 operating intensive livestock operations to implement sufficient controls. Ministry management verifies that operations are in compliance with the Ministry-approved permits and have sufficient controls (e.g., earthen manure storage structures, runoff control dikes and ditches, holding ponds, liner systems).¹ It found 76% of the operating intensive livestock operations complied with approved permits and 17% did not.

By April 2017, the Ministry had not confirmed compliance with approved permits for 7% of operations with a pre-1996 approval. It expects to complete its work for the remaining 7% of the pre-1996 intensive livestock operations by March 31, 2018.

Adequate waste storage is key to protecting groundwater and surface water from potential contamination. The pre-1996 operating intensive livestock operations need to be reassessed to ensure sufficient controls are in place to mitigate environmental risk.

¹ The Ministry requires intensive livestock operators to submit an application to the Ministry for approval of their proposed waste storage plan. Once the Ministry has considered the size of the operations, collected site information (e.g., topographic maps) and completes a site visit, it approves the plan/permit if sufficient controls for waste management are in place.