

Lawson's Quarry to close early

In response to inquiries by EAC, Marin County officials discovered late last year that the Lawson's Landing sand quarry had been exceeding the 60,000 tons a year allowed by its permit. The news that the quarry might have to close before the permit expires at the end of 2006 raised fears among dairy farmers, many of whom rely on Lawson's sand as bedding for their livestock.

Sand, however, is not the only—or the best—bedding material. Several Marin ranchers have already switched from sand—a non-renewable, non-recyclable resource, to more ecologically sustainable alternatives, such as rice hulls, wood shavings, almond shells and dried manure. Though adapting to these alternative bedding materials can be expensive, the materials themselves are typically cheaper and easier to dispose of than sand. The Straus Family Creamery, for example, switched to rice hulls because sand had to be constantly cleaned out of the ranch's ponds and had a damaging impact on their equipment. Now they compost the hulls and use them as fertilizer.

To allow dairy farmers some time to make the changeover, EAC has accepted a deal just worked out between the Lawson family, the County, and the Coastal Commission that allows the Lawson's to take another 30,000 tons for sale only to dairies and that requires the quarry to close permanently when the 30,000 ton limit is reached or on April 1, 2006, whichever comes first. The County will monitor all removals. As soon as the quarry closes, the Lawsons are to begin implementation of the existing quarry reclamation plan.

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