

Environment Agency prosecutes Worcestershire farm company for polluting local watercourse

- Members of public alert Environment Agency to dead fish
- Farm employees did not keep proper maintenance record

Springhill Farms (Persore) Limited pleaded guilty at Kidderminster Magistrates Court yesterday (25 May) to the illegal discharge of anaerobic digestate and sugar beet washings into the local watercourse, as well as failure to comply with nitrate regulations having allowed 2.5 times the limit to be spread onto land. The company was fined a total of £120,000 and ordered to pay costs of £28,125.19.

Officers from the Environment Agency were first alerted to the situation in February 2018 when members of the public discovered dead fish in Piddle Brook near Redditch.

An investigation discovered a faulty pipe had started to discharge anaerobic digestate into the watercourse from nearby Rotherdale Farm, which is run by the company.

Officers were told that the company used a lagoon to store digestate and used an underground pump system to spread liquid as a fertiliser. Around 220 dead fish were discovered in Piddle Brook and another 100 at a marina further down the watercourse.

Farm employees said they did not maintain records of the volumes in the lagoon and had no maintenance record either of the lagoon or pipework.

A further offence was recorded in May of 2018 when company officials notified the Environment Agency that foam had been reported in Piddle Brook.

An investigation revealed that sugar beet discharge, being used to irrigate a field, had started to spill into the watercourse from a faulty pipe.

No dead fish were recorded on this occasion and the farm took immediate steps to fix the faulty pipe.

The initial investigation had prompted the Environment Agency to ask the company for levels of nitrates used on the farm.

Regulations were introduced in 2015 aimed at farms limiting the amounts of nitrogen used on land in an effort to prevent the pollution of ground and surface waters.

However, the company admitted there was no nitrogen fertiliser plan in accordance with the regulations. It was subsequently discovered that 19 fields had been treated with amounts of nitrogen that exceeded the

250kilogram/hectare limit.

It is important all organisations take action to avoid polluting the environment through careful consideration of their processes and procedures, and the monitoring of operations.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

We always strive to work with farmers to reduce the risk of pollution, protect the environment, and ensure they are compliant with the regulations.

However, where there is evidence of serious pollution issues we will not hesitate to pursue the offenders concerned and take tough enforcement action.

We expect much better from such a large and experienced farming business, both for the environment and the local community.

If people are concerned about impacts on the environment, they should contact the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident line on 0800 807060.

Offences/charges

- Between 12 and 14 February 2018, Springhill Farms (Persore) Limited caused a water discharge activity, namely a discharge of anaerobic digestate into a tributary of the Piddle Brook, Wyre Piddle, when not authorised by an environmental permit to do so, contrary to Regulation 38(1)(a) and Regulation 12(1)(b) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.
- On 18 May 2018 Springhill Farms (Persore) Limited caused a water discharge activity, namely a discharge of sugar beet washings into a tributary of the Piddle Brook, Wyre Piddle, when not authorised by an environmental permit to do so, contrary to Regulation 38(1)(a) and Regulation 12(1)(b) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.
- Springhill Farms (Persore) Limited, between 1 June 2015 and 1 June 2017, being the occupier of a holding in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, namely Springhill Farm, failed to comply with the requirements of Regulation 8 of The Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2015, in that in respect of each field listed in the Schedule of Offences below, it failed to ensure that in any 12 month period the total amount of nitrogen in organic manure spread on any given hectare of land on the holding did not exceed 250kg, and each and every contravention listed in the Schedule of Offences below was a separate offence contrary to Regulation 41(1)(a) of the Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations

2015:

- Springhill Farms (Persnore) Limited, between 1 June 2015 and 1 June 2017, being the occupier of a holding in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, namely Rotherdale Farm, failed to comply with the requirements of Regulation 8 of The Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2015, in that in respect of each field listed in the Schedule of Offences below, it failed to ensure that in any 12 month period the total amount of nitrogen in organic manure spread on any given hectare of land on the holding did not exceed 250kg, and each and every contravention listed in the Schedule of Offences below was a separate offence contrary to Regulation 41(1)(a) of the Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2015.