

Somerset supplier to national supermarkets fined for polluting watercourse

The case was heard at Bristol Magistrates Court on 2 December 2021.

Alvis Brothers Ltd have a long history of environmental offending, having previously received a formal caution and warning letters from the Environment Agency.

Lye Cross Farm supplies cheese to major supermarkets including Waitrose, Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury, and exports to more than 40 countries around the world.

On 28 June 2019 an environment officer attended Lye Cross Farm following a report of slurry pollution to a tributary of the Congresbury Yeo near Cheddar.

The source of the pollution was found to be run off from a heap of farmyard manure at Lye Cross Farm. The run off had entered a surface water drain that led to the stream, and more than half a kilometre was polluted.

Alvis Brothers Ltd built a basic bund to contain the run off, but when environment officers returned to the farm on 2 July effluent was leaking from the bund and again contaminating the watercourse.

Assessments by the Environment Agency the following week found a chronic impact on the aquatic invertebrates living downstream of the farm, whilst sensitive species, indicating a good water quality, were only found upstream.

The leak of slurry from the bund was still happening on a return to site on 31 July.

On a farm visit on 18 September, environment officers witnessed a second pollution, this time as a result of pig slurry being spread on nearby fields. The slurry entered a field drain, discharging to the same watercourse.

In court District Judge Lynne Matthews described the offences as 'disgraceful' and 'appalling'. She said that the company should not require 'nurse-maiding' by the Environment Agency, given their farming experience.

Judge Matthews also said that in all the pollutions she had dealt with, offenders had not had as many slaps across the hand from the Environment Agency as in this case.

A quote on the Lye Cross Farm website says: "The Alvis Family takes the future of agriculture seriously – their livelihood depends entirely on how they look after their land and livestock. At Lye Cross Farm we practice two

different methods of farming – organic and non-organic. If managed properly both are sustainable and do not damage the environment...”

Environment Agency Environment Officer, Jenny Hasell, said:

“Repeated pollution events from Lye Cross Farm have caused protracted damage to the local environment.

“We expect much better from such a large and experienced farming business, both for the environment and the local communities. If you are concerned about pollution to water or land, contact our 24-hour incident line on 0800 807060.”

June 2019: gross sewage fungus growth downstream of the discharge

The offences

Causing an unpermitted water discharge activity, namely the discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter on and before 28 June 2019 from Lye Cross Farm, Redhill, Bristol into inland fresh waters contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and Regulation 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Fine £22,000.00

Causing an unpermitted water discharge activity, namely the discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter on and before 18 September 2019 from Lye Cross Farm, Redhill, Bristol into inland fresh waters contrary to Regulations 12(1)(b) and Regulation 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

Fine £ 7,000.00

Costs £ 8,003.02

Victim surcharge £ 181.00