Do the right thing...

Charles Ahlem
Charles Ahlem Ranches
60% of the milk was controlled by cooperatives
From Compliance to being a Goal... to now an Absolute... Regardless if the technology even exists

Hilmar Cheese Co. agrees to pay a $3 million fine

By Jennifer M. Fitzenberger
Bee Capitol Bureau

SACRAMENTO — The world's largest cheese plant — located about 80 miles north of Fresno — agreed Tuesday to a $3 million fine after allegations that it violated clean-water rules by dumping foul wastewater on surrounding land.

The settlement between Hilmar Cheese Co. and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board staff dedicates $1 million to study salinity problems in the Valley. About $1.9 million will go to a state fund used for cleanup efforts, and $350,000 will reimburse the attorney general for lawyer's fees.

The board will consider approving the settlement at its November meeting, said Catherine George, attorney for the board's staff. “The settlement is a package that the regional board staff thinks is a good resolution to this matter,” she said.

Hilmar Cheese had been fighting a $4 million fine after the Sacramento Bee reported the plant's wastewater had exceeded limits on its permit for six years. The company had received 4,000 violations in just the past four years.

The Hilmar Cheese case coincides with efforts by water officials to improve enforcement of wastewater rules.

Officials at Hilmar Cheese and representatives of the food processing industry said the settlement will help the Valley address underlying wastewater and salinity issues.

“It sets the foundation for solutions to the issues that plague the entire food processing industry in the Valley,” John Jeter, chief executive officer of Hilmar Cheese, said in a prepared statement. Jeter was not available for further comment.

Michael Boccadoro, a food processing industry lobbyist in Sacramento, said the settlement focuses on solutions rather than sanctions.

The study will look at ways for the food processing industry to better dispose of salt.

Food factories create wastewater by rinsing crops, mixing chemicals to help prepare the food and working through other processes. The water, often recycled, becomes laced with chemicals, tiny crop leftovers and salt.

The salt is naturally occurring in the crops, but it also comes from some processes. Salt and chemicals can turn well water undrinkable.

“Salt management is a complex problem that deserves careful thought and solutions that are both economically and environmentally sustainable,” Boccadoro said.

Hilmar Cheese is required to comply with the board’s existing cleanup and abatement order.

The reporter can be reached at jfitzenberger@fresnobee.com or (916) 326-5541.
PROTEIN
40–50% exported

LACTOSE
+95% exported

CHEESE
5-8% exported
Today, more than 80% of the milk is controlled by cooperatives.
As cooperative members, dairy farmers own processing plants

What is your coop doing to add value to milk?

Coop is not “those people” it is you…

How do you manage your supply vs demand for your products?

Agweb.com – Catherine Merlo
Public Accountability
Hilmar Jersey’s
Innovative Dairy Farmer of the Year
Chuck Ahlem
2015 Agriculturalist of the Year
Hilmar Cheese Company, Inc.
Sustainable Dairy Processor
Where do we go from here?

- Understand your business – not just dairy; but your cooperative
- Invest in Research – milk is amazing product, innovate to meet customer needs
- Make the industry’s voice heard – you don’t have to be in politics to make a difference
- Do the right thing and communicate it... to the community, regulators, government
Our Future