



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: IMMEDIATE
Date: June 28, 2007

Contact: Susan Massengale
Phone: (919) 733-7015 ext.227

State Renews Smithfield Packing Company Wastewater Permit

RALEIGH – The Division of Water Quality today reissued a permit to the Tar Heel Division of Smithfield Packing Company, Inc. for wastewater treatment and discharge.

The permit allows the Bladen County company to continue to operate a 3-million gallon per day wastewater facility for the treatment of process, sanitary and vehicle washdown water and to discharge the treated effluent into the Cape Fear River. Smithfield first received a permit to operate this facility in 1991; permits are generally effective for a five-year period. The facility had no water quality compliance violations during the most recent period of the permit.

The approved permit sets stricter requirements than the previous permit. Allowable groundwater usage is reduced by 5 percent from the previous permit to a maximum of 1.875 million gallons per day. Groundwater withdrawals are to be monitored seven days a week year-round and reported on a monthly basis. The permit also requires that Smithfield continue to implement its Environmental Management System that includes a commitment to reduce groundwater usage by an additional 10 percent during the term of the permit.

Another change requires plant upgrades needed to reduce nitrogen from the plant's effluent discharge. During the last permit cycle, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency put stricter limits on total nitrogen and ammonia discharges by the meat and poultry industry. As a result, Smithfield Packing is required to upgrade its wastewater treatment process to meet the new limits. A consent order will set a timeline for plant improvements with stipulated penalties if performance marks are not met. It also will require an interim total nitrogen limit to be enforced from the effective date of the permit and while the plant improvements are being constructed and brought online.

The Tar Heel facility is permitted a maximum production level of 176,000 hogs slaughtered per week and 8,488,000 per year. After obtaining an authorization to construct and submitting an engineer's certification for completion of the nitrogen effluent reduction modifications, production levels at the facility will be capped at 195,000 hogs per week and 9.5 million per year. No increase in groundwater usage or in the volume or character of effluent discharge is permitted by this production increase.

The permit becomes effective July 15 and can be viewed at the Division of Water Quality Web site at: <http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/admin/pubinfo/DWQPubInfoHotTopics.htm>.

#####