

## Agricultural Groundwater Discharge Permitting FAQ

### What is a groundwater discharge permit?

A groundwater discharge permit sets the conditions for how wastewater from an operation not connected to a wastewater treatment plant can be disposed of. Disposal can happen through subsurface disposal, land application, or a variety of other methods.

### What is the purpose of a groundwater discharge permit?

The intent of a groundwater discharge permit is to protect groundwater quality, as many use groundwater as a drinking water source. Permits are handled by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, & Energy (EGLE). This permit **does not** cover systems, like a home septic system, that are permitted through the local health department.

### Why is a home septic system not sufficient to handle processing wastewater?

Generally, when the local health department approves the septic system for your home, they are not considering the processing wastewater, but what your household is using (washer, toilets, etc.). When the system is not built to accommodate the additional wastewater, it can destroy or cause that system to fail. If the septic system fails, that means that the wastewater is not being properly treated and could potentially cause water quality issues.

### Are all groundwater discharge permits the same?

No, groundwater discharge permits can vary widely depending on the volume of wastewater, the contents of the wastewater, location of the operation, and system for handling it.

### When might you need a groundwater discharge permit?

The following activities may require a groundwater discharge permit if the wastewater is not sent to a wastewater treatment plant via sewer lines:

- Milk, cheese, & ice cream processing
- Slaughterhouses & meat processors
- Fruit & vegetable processing
- Fruit & vegetable washing
- Wineries, breweries, distilleries, etc.
- Contact cooling water
- Egg washing
- Some vehicle washes
- Other agriculture-related activities where wastewater is created and is discharged on/in the ground.

### What is required as part of a groundwater discharge permit?

Specific permit requirements may vary based on the operation, but generally requirements primarily fall into the following categories: Effluent limitations and monitoring (measuring of and limits for what is in your wastewater), facility operation and maintenance (different requirements based on the system that handles your wastewater), water treatment additives, and a sampling and analysis plan. **This permit does not preclude you from other requirements/permits** such as NPDES permits or pre-treatment programs.

### How much will it cost to get a permit?

The short answer is it depends on what type of operation you have. The main fixed cost you will incur is the annual permit fee. See details below on fees for different permit types:

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- Permit fee: \$1,800 annually
  - 2210(y) Permit: This permit tends to cover small or medium operations that don't fit into other permit categories. This may include wineries, breweries, cideries, dairy processing, and other agricultural processing.
  - 2215 Permit: For agriculture, this would primarily be meat processors and slaughterhouses and vehicle washes covered under a general permit
- Permit fee: \$240 annually
  - 2211 Permits: Less than 50,000 gallons per day of fruit and vegetable washwater and fruit and vegetable processing
  - 2213 permits: Egg washing, non-contact cooling water, contact cooling water
- Permit fee: \$7,500 Annually
  - 2218 Permit: This tends to be permits for larger, more complex operations.

There will be additional variable costs to follow permit conditions. These costs will be dependent on the commodity, volume of wastewater, type of wastewater, etc. For permits for large processors and/or complex wastewater (e.g., if using brine), hiring a consultant to assist may also be useful.

**What are the first steps in obtaining a permit?**

To start an application, go to the [MiEnviroPortal](https://tinyurl.com/GWDPmtApp) (formerly MiWaters) to create an account. Instructions at <https://tinyurl.com/GWDPmtApp> are helpful when filling out an application.

**What is the duration of a permit?**

Generally, permits are good for five years.

**Why might others in the industry not need a permit?**

If an operation is located where they can connect to a wastewater treatment plant, a groundwater discharge permit is not needed. In addition, operations with smaller volumes of wastewater can apply for an exemption from a permit.

**What if I'm verified in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)?**

On-farm processing is not verified by MAEAP.

**Does this impact my Right to Farm protections?**

No, but processors are encouraged to look at the Generally Accepted Processing Practices at: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/environment/rtf/gapps>

**Can I get an exemption?**

There are several exemptions available for small volumes of wastewater/washwater, listed below. Exemptions are **not** automatic and need to be applied for.

- Limited wholesale processing: less than 100 gallons per day
- Fruit and vegetable washing: less than 50 gallons per day
- Dairy/cheese processing: less than 100 gallons per day
- Wild game processing: less than 100 gallons per day
- Poultry processing: 30 birds per day, no more than 500 annually

**Questions?** Contact MFB's Tess Van Gorder at [tvangor@michfb.com](mailto:tvangor@michfb.com) or 517-323-6711

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