



## **USDA-CSREES 2006 National Water Quality Conference**

### [Assessing Drinking Water Quality for Small & Underserved Audiences in Delaware](#)

As one member of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Water Quality Program's Small and Underserved Audience team, Delaware State University has initiated a well water testing program in the state. In addition, to providing free well water testing, we are also administering a survey instrument to the well owners at the time their water samples are collected. Data from both the water quality analysis and the survey instrument are being analyzed collectively with the intention of better targeting our future educational efforts.

Based on the data collected, we see that more than 15% of the water samples contained coliform bacteria and more than 30% of the tested samples exceeded the EPA's MCLG of 10 ppm for nitrate. The majority of the respondents (>75%) are age 45 or older and more than half of them hold college degrees. Further, more than 66% of the households surveyed have no children currently living at home. Although our data is limited by the actual numbers of samples we have been able to collect so far, it does indicate that there are potentially serious issues facing our small, underserved farmers in Delaware.

Notwithstanding the success of our Small Farm Technical Assistance and Outreach Program, we have had great difficulty getting buy-in from our existing clientele for this program. Reasons for this apparent reluctance to participate are thought to include fear of reprisal, should EPA drinking water standards be exceeded, a 'why change what isn't broken' philosophy and a lack of knowledge as to the potential health risks of having contaminated drinking water.

Author: Dennis McIntosh