

Talking Points about Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

Many people want to call/email their Town and County Supervisors to state their concerns about the possibility of allowing Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) into our Towns and Counties. Moratoriums were instituted to give governments time to study the adverse effects of CAFOs, yet, the committees instituted by Polk and Burnett Counties refuse to allow health professional to testify to the scientifically proven **adverse** health effects often found in areas hosting CAFOs (ie. IOWA). As such, if you are concerned for the health and safety of you and your family, you should call your officials and state your concerns. Here are a few talking points:

FARMS not FACTORIES

Local farmers are being snowed by the CAFO interests. Most farmers in the area are not in excess of the thousand animal unit limits that triggers the need to file a WPDES permit and to which most of these moratoriums and potential increased regulations will not apply. (Do note that the purposed moratorium for Polk County applies to operations with 500 or more animal units (AU). While Burnett County is 1,000 AU)

What benefit does a local farmer get from a huge operation like this coming into their backyard? Probably the same benefit a rural local hardware store gets from a Walmart or Home Depot moving into their neighborhood. Seriously, the only one likely benefiting is the farmer selling his property or getting cheap manure to spread on farm fields in the area. Keep in mind that local farmers have carefully spread their own manure on their fields for decades and in some cases, centuries. They have every incentive to spread carefully to protect their farm water from contamination and to protect local water resources where they fish or swim. CAFOs generate millions of gallons of liquid hog waste yearly (the Trade Lake facility, alone, projects 9 million gallons per year). It festers in large pools under the facility and must be emptied regularly, regardless of weather or seasonal conditions. To CAFOs, it is a waste by product that must be removed to make way for the next batch. As Limited Liability Companies, they have no local connections or interests, only a profit motive.

While they likely aren't going to benefit from the siting of a CAFO in their locality, if local farmers support a CAFO coming into our backyard – and there is a spill or other hazardous situation – the backlash is definitely going to affect all agricultural operations. (SEE: Emerald Sky in St. Croix County). Agricultural communities benefit, because the new regulations likely won't affect their operation and will protect them from adverse consequences of a breach by a large CAFO.

Tourism!

They want to talk about the financial benefit from agriculture. Talk about the financial benefit from tourism and those who own vacation lake homes. Moratoriums and additional regulations are not going to kill agriculture in Burnett & Polk County – but destroying the environment and stinking up the countryside will kill tourism – and that will affect everyone in Burnett & Polk County, including the farmers. The higher tax base collected from lake cabins and resorts go toward reduced taxes for the other farmers and resident landowners. Take away that tourism tax base and other property taxes will skyrocket! Government is not known for cutting expenses, only raising taxes to accommodate their current budgets.

Property Rights

To those who argue that they don't want government control over what they can do on or with their property – it's not what people are doing on their own property that's the problem. It's the commercial/industrial operations directly affecting what neighbors can do with **their** own property. It affects whether they can leave their windows open or sit on their decks because of the stench. It affects whether they can drink water from their own wells because of the ground water contamination. It affects whether they can swim or fish in local lakes and streams because of E.coli or algae blooms resulting from surface runoff of manure.

Use the example of a neighboring landowner deciding that they want to start a blasting operation, causing foundations of nearby homes to crack and debris to fly onto neighboring property. No one would say that's okay. But if that happens, you can sue for those damages – whereas, thanks to Wisconsin Statutes 823.08, suits for damage caused by agricultural entities are virtually impossible to bring in Wisconsin. So those entities better be well regulated at the get-go. The other example would be if someone decides they want to start a nightclub in the house right next door and crank the music until 3 o'clock in the morning. That's all activity happening on their property, but no one would say that's okay.

Air and Water Quality

Finally, those that oppose CAFOs in the area are concerned that it's going to affect the groundwater, surface water and air quality. They are concerned that it will cause the spread of disease and the proliferation of antibiotic resistant bacteria (SEE: MERSA). They worry that it will cause local real property values to drop. Now, despite the fact that there is a wealth of scientific literature that confirms that these risks are real, those few farmers who support the siting of a CAFO in our area, claim that these risks will not materialize. But as we all sit here today nobody knows. The board members cannot say with any confidence that there won't be runoff into our lakes and streams. They cannot say that if there's a major spill, it won't cause an E. coli outbreak in a local lake or seep into our groundwater. They can't say whether the risk of antibiotic resistant bacteria is truly a concern. What they can do, however, is take the time to study these issues and see whether they are truly a risk to our health, environment and economy. Since they don't know the answers, the intelligent and responsible path is to take the time and do the research to determine the answer and create an Operations Ordinance to address those concerns.

What can you do?

Call and email your local government officials. State your concerns. Demand an Operational Ordinance like the ones passed by Trade Lake and Eureka Townships based on scientific evidence. Protect your family's air, water and property values. Protect your family's health. Be involved. It's your right and obligation. It's DEMOCRACY.