

Midwest Environmental ADVOCATES

pro bono publico

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 6, 2002

Contacts:

Andrew Hanson, Attorney
Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc.
608-251-5047

Kerry Schumann, Director
Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group
608-251-1918

DNR to Issue Waste Permit to Midwest's Largest Integrated Turkey Producer

Barron, WI. The DNR will hold an informational hearing on its proposed issuance of a waste permit for the largest integrated turkey raising firm in the Midwest. The hearing will be held on May 7, 2002 at 9:00 a.m. at the Barron County Courthouse.

The permit will regulate the waste disposal of 55 turkey livestock factories either owned or controlled by Hormel Foods, an Austin, Minnesota based corporation that recently purchased the Jennie-O Turkey Store, Inc, of Barron, Wisconsin. The 55 turkey factories raise a total of 4.7 million turkeys, and all are located in northwestern and central Wisconsin.

According to the permit, the DNR proposes to allow Hormel Foods to place as much as 130,000 tons of turkey manure per year in piles known as "stacks" on the edges of crop fields in Barron County and other surrounding counties. The stacks can remain on the fields for up to a year, until Hormel is required to spread the manure on the fields as fertilizer. The process is referred to as "headland stacking," and may be a source of runoff into groundwater and surface water during rainfall and spring snowmelt.

The DNR admits that it has not fully analyzed the environmental impacts of headland stacking, and has entered into a separate agreement with Hormel requiring the corporation to study the surface water and ground water impacts of stacking the phosphorus and nitrogen rich manure on crop fields.

Although manure can provide valuable nutrients for crops, too much nitrogen can contaminate drinking water supplies. Similarly, too much phosphorus can contaminate surface waters, causing algal blooms and in severe cases, fish kills.

"By allowing headland stacking, the DNR is permitting a practice that no one fully understands," said Andrew Hanson, an attorney with Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc., a nonprofit environmental law center. "The DNR should be required to study the groundwater and surface water pollution caused by headland stacking, and then decide whether to allow the practice. The agency is putting the cart before the horse."

"We just started the fishing season, and families are planning summer vacations around the many waters of our state. Yet, the DNR is poised to issue a permit to allow this largely untested manure handling practice that could make the surrounding waters unsafe for fishing, swimming and drinking," said Kerry Schumann, WISPIRG Director.

Despite the budget crisis facing the DNR, the agency has committed \$10,000 to help Hormel conduct the study on headland stacking.

“This is corporate welfare at its worst,” according to Andrew Hanson. He questioned, “Why is the state subsidizing a corporation that had more than \$4 billion in sales last year?”

###