

Midwest Environmental A D V O C A T E S

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Small Family Farmers and the Environment Suffer Under Department of Agriculture Program.

Madison, WI. Midwest Environmental Advocates and Wisconsin's Environmental Decade released a report today that analyzes the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection's (DATCP's) subsidy program for farms that pollute Wisconsin's waters. Through a combination of database analysis and six case studies, "Wisconsin's Cost-Share Program for Farm Pollution: The Milking of the Public" shows that the Cost-Share Program favors large over small family farms and does not always reduce pollution.

Under this program, when a farm has had a "significant discharge" of pollution into waters of the state, rather than receiving a fine, it becomes eligible for financial and technical assistance to fix the problem.

"Our study shows that DATCP is giving a disproportionate amount of money to the largest farms, often with dubious environmental benefits," according to Dr. David Zaber, of Wisconsin's Environmental Decade and co-author of the report.

"The state needs to increase the money appropriated for Cost-Share assistance to farmers, but the money should be directed towards small farms that are most in need of assistance and there must be tangible environmental benefits," asserted Melissa K. Scanlan, Legal Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates and co-author of the report. Ms Scanlan added, "The agency should ensure that public money is resulting in public benefits more than private benefits."

Of the money given to farms to help them fix water pollution problems from 1984 to 1999, the report reveals that:

- Large operations (300 - 1000 AU¹) comprised 12.9% of the total number assessed and received 33.7% of total cost-share dollars. Average cost-share per operation: \$56,060.
- Medium-sized operations (150 - 299 AU) comprised 21.4% of the total number assessed and received 21.2% of total cost-share dollars. Average cost-share per operation: \$20,756.
- Small operations (<150 AU) comprised 65.5% of the total number assessed and received 45% of total cost-share dollars. Average cost-share per operation: \$14,443.

The VanDerGeest Dairy in Marathon County received over \$100,000 from the state, took five years to fix its manure runoff problems, and expanded to become the largest dairy farm in Wisconsin. The study highlights five additional cases in Grant, Vernon, Brown, and Jackson counties. "We are giving away taxpayer's money to subsidize livestock factory expansions," commented John Kinsman, a small dairy farmer and President of Family Farm Defenders. He added, "The casual way this agency has approached fixing water pollution problems is shocking."

To view the full report go to www.midwest-e-advocates.org.

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¹ AU refers to Animal Units. An Animal Unit is based on the amount of manure produced by a 1,000 lb. steer.