



For Immediate Release
August 10, 2006

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Senate Agriculture Committee Passes the Buck Back to the Department of Natural Resources on Livestock Factory Regulation, Puts Rural Wisconsin Residents At Risk

Madison, WI - Years of work to stop livestock factories from contaminating drinking water and area streams and rivers was set back to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on Thursday when Wisconsin Senate's Agriculture Committee refused to approve the rule and instead sent it back for modifications.

"These rules are critical to stopping the manure spills, well contaminations, and fishkills that have plagued Wisconsin in the past several years," said Andrew Hanson, staff attorney with Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc., a non-profit environmental law center that has worked with families whose drinking water was contaminated with manure. "The Senate's delay puts Wisconsin's rural families and children at continued risk of groundwater contamination and severe illness," he added.

Scott Treml testified that a large livestock factory had contaminated his family's well, and he had to take their baby to the hospital as a result of a manure-related illness. He showed the Committee samples of the clotted brown water that had come out of his tap.

Another person testified that the water she grew up swimming in has become clogged with algae due to manure contamination.

Another person testified to seeing manure running in streams across the road after winter spreading.

Throughout eight hours of testimony, members of the Senate Committee were frequently gone from the proceedings. The Committee went into Executive Session and then voted to kick the proposed rule back to the DNR.

This delay is a grave disappointment to the individuals and families who took time off of work, drove hours, and then waited all day to testify. The additional time it will take the DNR to complete modifications to the proposed rule may well allow new livestock factories another winter season to spread liquid manure on frozen ground, increasing the chances for more public health problems due to contaminated wells.

FAST FACTS

A **“large” CAFO** is a livestock operation that confines more than 700 mature milk cows, 1,000 beef cattle, 2,500 pigs, 55,000 turkeys, etc. (all 1,000 “animal units”).

The DNR regulates CAFOs under its regulations in Chapter NR 243.

Of Wisconsin’s 30,000 farms with livestock, 145 operations have enough manure producing animals to be considered Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO).

CAFOs make up less than 1% of Wisconsin’s farms, but produce more than 10% of the manure.

CAFOs produce disproportionately more manure in smaller areas; manure spills from these large operations can significantly harm public health and natural resources.

In the first few months of 2006, **almost 70 wells in southern Brown County were contaminated with bacteria**. Some rural families noted that their tap water smelled like manure. The contamination caused many people to become ill, suffering from stomach cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and chills.

Between 2004 and 2005, approximately **34 rural wells became contaminated** in northeastern Wisconsin from what the DNR believes was liquid or solid manure. In one case, a CAFO is alleged to have contaminated six wells in Dodge County, and in another case, a CAFO is alleged to have contaminated as many as 11 wells. The map to the left was compiled by the DNR.

Manure contamination makes people sick. Manure contains harmful bacteria that cause serious illness in people that unknowingly drink contaminated water. In some cases, children have gotten sick from drinking tap water that their parents did not know was contaminated with manure. One infant in Kewaunee County was rushed to a hospital for emergency care.

Manure contains ammonia – toxic to fish – that can destroy **nationally treasured trout fisheries**, as happened in Black Earth Creek in 2001 and the West Branch of the Sugar River in 2005.

Of 52 manure spills between July 2004 and June 2005, many were caused by large and medium CAFOs and **most were linked to manure spreading on frozen and snow-covered ground**, when the risk of manure spills to streams and groundwater is highest.

Further, many of the manure spills that caused fishkills or well-contaminations were allegedly from **manure applications that appeared to comply with appropriate standards**. This underscores the need to revise the standards and restrict manure spreading on ground that is frozen and covered with snow.

Families whose wells have been contaminated have incurred **medical bills, lost work wages** spent securing safe water for their families and dealing with the illnesses, and had to pay for **the cost of drilling a new, deeper well** with no guarantee that the well will not be contaminated by manure again.

The cost of drilling a **new well** can be as much as **\$10-15,000**, a devastating financial burden for Wisconsin’s working families.