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Media Contacts:

Barbara Sha Cox, SRAP/Indiana CAFO Watch
765-962-2184 | barbarasha1@msn.com

Carrie Crabill, DeKalb County Citizens for Conservation
260-573-8061 | dccforconservation@gmail.com

DeKalb County Mom and Community Take on Proposed Mega Dairy – and Win

Victory for local residents over Cardinal Dairies, as group makes case for risks to water, air and local community health from proposed 160-acre facility

Auburn, IN—February 25, 2015—A controversial application submitted by dairy operator Cardinal Dairies LLC to the DeKalb County Plan Commission seeking to bring a 5,000 animal dairy operation to the county was abruptly withdrawn last week due to community questions about the water and air quality risks it would impose on local residents. Leading the charge was Butler, Indiana resident and new mother Carrie Crabill, who worked with other members of the community group DeKalb County Citizens for Conservation to rally public support for educating the Plan Commission and resisting construction of the industrial-sized dairy.

Cardinal Dairies unexpectedly withdrew its effort to site the CAFO just one day before a much-anticipated public meeting on the dairy's construction plan. The site had already been re-zoned by DeKalb County Commissioners for high-intensity agricultural use.

"This would have been a life-changing event for our young family, our neighbors, our community and our county if Cardinal's plan went unchallenged," said Crabill, who lives with her husband and daughter less than a mile from the proposed dairy site. "It's frightening to know how close we came to having a polluting nightmare just down the road, and that our local government was willing to approve it."

The 160-acre parcel was earmarked to house more than 30 cows per acre, creating what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency terms a concentrated animal feeding operation, or CAFO, which routinely cause extensive environmental damage and contribute to long-term public health issues, including breathing problems, skin rashes and chronic headaches for surrounding residents. The proposed Cardinal facility would have been built just two miles from Butler, a community of more than 2,600 that relies on wells for its drinking water supply.

CAFO-related water resource damage includes widespread contamination of local creeks and tributaries from run-off and manure storage lagoon leaks that can dump several thousand gallons of untreated animal waste into local environs annually, threatening drinking and recreational water sources. Also, noxious and harmful CAFO odors containing a combination of ammonia, hydrogen sulfide and volatile particulate compounds routinely travel more than 3 miles from facilities.

"Agriculture is important to Indiana, but not at the expense of health and safety of those in surrounding areas," said Barbara Sha Cox of Indiana CAFO Watch and an associate with the national nonprofit [Socially Responsible Agricultural Project \(SRAP\)](#). "The community worked together to protect their environment, property values and quality of life. This is the best possible outcome for DeKalb County."

Community fears included the expert opinion from SRAP that pollutants from the new dairy would regularly reach the St. Joseph River. DeKalb County is where the St. Joseph flows into the Maumee River, a waterway already determined by the U.S.-Canadian [International Joint Commission](#) to be the major contributor to the well-documented phosphorus pollution in Lake Erie.

“DeKalb County must be aware that what happens on their watershed will affect the Maumee and the Western Basin of Lake Erie where the 2014 water crisis occurred,” said Cox.

Crabill says the Cardinal Dairies’ reversal has a message for many communities across Indiana and other states that are experiencing similar CAFO threats, “If you love your home and value your health, do not stay silent. Organize, work with partners and challenge your local officials with a combination of solid science and common sense. Industrial agriculture can be beaten.”

Copies of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management letter notifying of Cardinal Dairies’ application withdrawal are available upon request.

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Socially Responsible Agricultural Project provides free, professional assistance to communities working to protect themselves from factory farms and their impact on local communities and populations, and to those who are trying to reclaim agriculture by producing and marketing sustainable agricultural goods. More information can be found at www.sraproject.org.