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A Wisconsin County in Crisis: Industrial Dairy RAP SHEETS Released Show State-Sanctioned Contamination of Kewaunee County

Investigation highlights how WDNR's failure to act is destroying public health, drinking water; Return to local control, state CAFO policy review proposed

GREEN BAY, WI—JUNE 10, 2015—Today, a coalition of local, state and national organizations led by the [Socially Responsible Agricultural Project \(SRAP\)](#) released a damaging report and recommendations for reform on the hazardous, uncontrolled growth of industrial dairy pollution and its impact on the residents of Kewaunee County, Wisconsin. [“The RAP SHEETS: Industrial Dairies in Kewaunee County, Wisconsin”](#) is the result of more than a year-long investigation of government documents identifying negligent management of industrial dairy concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and a lack of oversight and enforcement by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) as catalysts for skyrocketing pollution that has pushed Kewaunee County to an environmental and public health crisis.

Partner organizations [Family Farm Defenders](#) and [Kewaunee CARES](#) joined SRAP to research, publish and provide recommendations for the first-of-its-kind report on the multiple violations, hundreds of manure management failures and a host of operational problems at the 16 large CAFOs operating within Kewaunee County. Reform proposals include reversing the industry-friendly 2004 Livestock Facility Siting Law and reinstating community control over CAFO zoning and construction -- an action that would begin to restore Kewaunee County, and save other Wisconsin counties from a similar fate.

“We came to Kewaunee County because industrial dairies are out of control and Wisconsin DNR is out of touch,” said SRAP Regional Coordinator Scott Dye. “The ongoing contamination of Kewaunee County’s land, water, air and people right under the nose of the state agency meant to protect them is indefensible, has created a public health emergency and requires immediate action. This report gives WDNR a roadmap for reform and a good place to start.”

Kewaunee County currently ranks first in the state for cattle density, CAFO density per acre and recent cow herd growth. The county is also number two in total number of permitted CAFOs for its 15 industrial dairies and one large-scale beef operation, just behind Brown County. The result of a massive dairy cow population in Kewaunee County -- current figures show cattle outnumber people 4 to 1 -- is an out-of-control, hazardous manure issue on the western shore of Lake Michigan. Kewaunee County CAFOs produce the shocking waste equivalent of 924,882 humans -- approximately equal to the populations of Milwaukee, Madison and Green Bay combined.

“This report reveals nothing less than the state-sanctioned contamination of Kewaunee County’s farm families and rural environment,” said John Peck, Ph.D., Executive Director of Family Farm Defenders. “Whether by design or neglect, the unchecked spread of industrial dairies in this county has led to a serious and frightening health and safety crisis that WDNR cannot ignore any longer.”

In documented problems spanning three decades, the RAP SHEETS highlight WDNR's routine practice of rubber-stamping CAFO applications, resulting in the troubling fact that the Wisconsin county is buckling under the yearly weight of 340 million gallons of untreated liquefied CAFO manure and 81,332 tons of untreated, pharmaceutical-laden solid CAFO manure which is applied annually to local cropland. The report documents a public health crisis that has stretched Kewaunee County's human and environmental safety standards to the point of near collapse. Residents report overwhelming noxious odors, manure residue in home tap water, illegal manure spills and runoff into local waterways and properties, undocumented fish kills in local streams and physical ailments, including respiratory issues, headaches, watering eyes and nausea.

"If the harsh, health-threatening conditions faced in many Kewaunee County homes were happening in Madison, the problem would be solved and this report wouldn't be necessary," said Lynn Utesch, grass-fed beef farmer and Co-founder of the community group Kewaunee CARES. "WDNR has failed to carry out its most basic mission: to protect the health of Wisconsinites and the Walker Administration needs to read this report, admit its shortcomings and change policy now."

Complicating WDNR's resistance to properly regulate CAFO sitings is the geologic fact that Kewaunee County, along with all or part of 41 Wisconsin counties, sits upon *karst* – the highly fractured, shallow carbonate bedrock that allows pollutants to easily enter shallow groundwater aquifers. Documents on county-wide drinking water well testing in June 2013 showed that 30.85% of the wells tested contained nitrates and/or dangerous E. coli bacteria at levels deemed unsafe for human consumption by state and federal authorities. Given that approximately 95% of Kewaunee County's rural residents rely upon groundwater resources as their sole source of drinking water, the risks associated with the state's dairy industry and WDNR's faulty dairy CAFO permitting and regulation practices cannot be denied.

"This nation has an enormous industrial dairy pollution problem," said SRAP's Dye, "but our report is hard evidence that the pollution of Kewaunee County ranks among the most hazardous of any community in the United States."

The RAP SHEETS report features several procedural and practice improvement recommendations designed to advise and support WDNR action in changing its current permitting, oversight and enforcement approach to industrial dairies. Included are proper public notice and comment periods, mandating tougher engineering requirements on CAFO-related infrastructure, creation of a statewide fee-funded clean-up fund, local community coordination to support local environment monitoring and repealing the failed 2004 Livestock Facility Siting Law to return decision-making on CAFO sitings and regulation to the local officials and citizens who live with the impact of industrial animal facility operations every day.

A copy of the 140-page report, "*The RAP SHEETS: Industrial Dairies in Kewaunee County, Wisconsin -- The Regulatory Failure of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources | A Threat to Public Health and the Environment*," can be found [here](#) or obtained by request.

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Socially Responsible Agricultural Project (SRAP) 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.srapproject.org.

Family Farm Defenders (FFD) has the mission to create a farmer-controlled and consumer-oriented food and fiber system, based upon democratically controlled institutions that empower farmers to speak for and respect themselves in their quest for social and economic justice. FFD supports sustainable agriculture, farm worker rights, animal welfare, consumer safety, fair trade, and food sovereignty. Please visit www.familyfarmers.org.

Kewaunee CARES (Citizens Advocating for Responsible Environmental Stewardship) advocates for stewardship of the land, air and water to provide a thriving environment, economy and community in Kewaunee County, Wisconsin. More information can be found at www.kewauneecares.wordpress.com.