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## Federal Funding Flows While Lake Erie Contamination Grows

*New Less=More Report offers first-of-its-kind mapping of factory farm pollution & federal subsidies; 630 million gallons of waste annually in watershed, \$17 million in subsidies to waste generators since 2008*

**LANSING, MI—NOVEMBER 19, 2015**—Today, the [Less=More Coalition](#) released a report that takes an unprecedented look at the relationship between the manure load from factory farms in the Western Lake Erie Watershed (WLEW) and the federal subsidies that have poured into the region to facilities that generate that waste over the last seven years. Between 2008 and 2015, U.S. Department of Agriculture direct payments, cost-shares and other conservation subsidies to owners of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) totaled more than \$16.8 million in the WLEW, which includes Ohio, southern Michigan and eastern Indiana.

The report, “*Follow the Manure: Factory Farms and the Lake Erie Algae Crisis*,” shows that millions of dollars in taxpayer funds continued to be disbursed, even as phosphorus contamination levels in the WLEW climbed and CAFOs in the watershed were fined for illegal waste discharges. The Less=More report also provides a groundbreaking set of interactive maps [at this link](#) that locate all CAFOs in the watershed and connect them with novel data about manure production and subsidies in the region.

“While agricultural runoff has been identified as a major contributor to the growth of Lake Erie algae blooms, no one has connected the dots between the problem and federal subsidies before,” said Gail Philbin, director of the Michigan Sierra Club, a Less=More member. “This report is a portrait of a watershed inundated by waste and taxpayer money to fix it, but with nothing much to show for it after many years.”

*Follow the Manure* also spotlights the environmental violations and subsidy records of seven CAFOs in two counties in southern Michigan—Lenawee and Hillsdale Counties—that offer a closer look at what is happening throughout the WLEW.

Currently, 146 industrial CAFOs are sited in the WLEW, housing nearly 12 million animals that produce more than 630 million gallons of waste annually. The manure contains dissolved phosphorus, which is considered the key culprit in the growth of blue-green algae, known as Cyanobacteria, and microcystin that caused the 2014 toxic algal poisoning of the City of Toledo’s drinking water and this year’s record algal bloom in Lake Erie.

“The deterioration of the WLEW is proof that no amount of money can create a healthy, safe and sustainable CAFO,” said Lynn Henning, a Lenawee County, Mich., family farmer. Henning is the 2010 Goldman Environmental Prize winner (North America) and a regional associate for Socially Responsible Agricultural Project. “Instead of slowing or reversing the pollution levels, the subsidies seem to only deepen and accelerate the contamination crisis.”

The WLEW covers portions of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, encompassing the Maumee River, the largest tributary to Lake Erie, as well as several other major waterways, including Michigan’s River Raisin. Ohio has the

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largest land area in the WLEW, and its 57 CAFOs generate the most manure. Michigan and Indiana also play a major role in the WLEW, together contributing nearly 38 percent of the waste in the watershed.

“CAFO owners and those who should be regulating them tell you everything is being done to protect our land, water, natural resources and public health,” said Henning. “This report says otherwise.”

Findings in the report include data showing that Indiana’s Adams County has received the most federal subsidies to-date (\$10,622,663); Michigan’s Lenawee County is home to the most CAFOs with environmental violations (67) and the most illegal discharges (37); and Ohio’s Paulding County along with Lenawee are the top manure producers in the WLEW. In addition, CAFOs in the watershed were cited for 112 illegal discharges of waste since 2008, an average of 16 per year, and were fined a total of \$1,137,000.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires certain qualifying farms to obtain a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. *Follow the Manure* demonstrates that, despite this regulation, many CAFOs fail to meet the EPA Clean Water Act regulations as stipulated in their NPDES CAFO permits.

“This is just the tip of the iceberg,” said Philbin. “Our report only represents what we were able to track down from Freedom of Information Act requests and our own research online and in person. It’s not easily accessible information, and it’s highly likely that there are many more federal payments and violations that occurred over the last seven years that aren’t reflected in this report.”

A set of interactive maps included in the report provides a new and essential information tool for public understanding of CAFOs in the WLEW. Using the maps, individuals, state agencies and watchdog organizations can obtain detailed information on which animals are housed at each CAFO, the amount of manure produced, the violations incurred and the taxpayer subsidies awarded.

“If information is power, this report is a game-changer,” said Pam Taylor of Environmentally Concerned Citizens of South Central Michigan, a Less=More coalition member. “Before, there was no single source where people could go to find accurate and current information about the largest factory farms in the WLEW with explanations for how the manure they produce impacts Lake Erie, how it contributes to algae blooms and how federal subsidies are connected. Now there is.”

The Less=More coalition presents *Follow the Manure* for use by policymakers and agricultural producers to aid in understanding of the issues at play in the WLEW and to facilitate efforts to solve Lake Erie’s algae problem. To this end, the report contains several recommendations for key first steps to tackle the impacts of CAFO waste in the WLEW. These steps include: declaring Lake Erie an impaired watershed; ending the practice of giving federal taxpayer dollars to polluting CAFOs; changing the phosphorus soil-test requirements; and banning the application of CAFO waste on frozen or snow-covered ground within the WLEW.

A copy of “*Follow the Manure: Factory Farms and the Lake Erie Algae Crisis*” can be downloaded at <http://www.sierraclub.org/michigan/lessmore-reports>.

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**Less=More** is a coalition of organizations engaged in diverse aspects of our food system and seeking to level the playing field for sustainable farming in Michigan. Less support for polluting factory farms means a more sustainable Michigan. For more information, please visit [MoreforMichigan.org](http://MoreforMichigan.org).

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Members of the Less=More Coalition include: Beery Farms of Michigan, LLC, the Center for Food Safety, Crane Dance Farm, LLC, ELFCO food cooperative, Environmentally Concerned Citizens of South Central Michigan, Food & Water Watch, Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council, Groundswell Farm, Zeeland, Humane Society of the United States, Michigan Voices for Good Food Policy, Michigan Young Farmers Coalition, Sierra Club Michigan Chapter and Socially Responsible Agricultural Project.

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