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Gordon County Residents Call on Commissioners to Address Protections from Growing Health & Safety Risks of Industrial Poultry Operations

Public health authority Johns Hopkins sends County officials letter & research on potential public risks; More than 300 mega-houses currently operating in the County, more planned

CALHOUN, GA —APRIL 12, 2017—Supported by peer-reviewed scientific research and expert perspective on the impacts of industrial poultry operations provided in a letter delivered to the Gordon County Commissioners from the [Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Center for a Livable Future \(CLF\)](#), a local community group is calling for a full review of regulatory standards to protect public health and community safety. The group, Environmental Defense of Gordon County, requested CLF review conditions in Gordon County, citing the goal of protecting “the air quality, the rivers, the lakes, the streams, the land, the property values, and the overall quality of life of our community, county and city.”

Currently, Gordon County is the site of operations housing more than 15 million chickens -- with millions more slated in an expansion temporarily curbed by a 60-day emergency moratorium for public review and the threat posed by recent bird flu hazards in the state.

The April 5th CLF letter to the Gordon County Commissioners highlights the mounting threats local residents face from constant exposure to the impacts of industrial poultry, including the spread of community infections and respiratory problems brought on by massive amounts of waste generated by the millions of birds housed throughout the County. The facilities, called concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, continue to expand across the state of Georgia, particularly in Gordon County where 300 mega-houses are operating with hundreds more preparing for construction. A mega-house is a massive enclosure as large as 60 feet wide and 600 feet long, holding up to 52,000 birds each.

“This community simply cannot live with the hazards these industrial poultry operations bring,” said local resident Russell Bryant, a member of Environmental Defense of Gordon County. “Our elected officials need information and expertise to help make solid decisions, and Johns Hopkins has provided it. Now it’s time for them to roll up their sleeves and provide the sort of protection every citizen deserves.”

Bryant’s home in Calhoun is surrounded by 24 poultry mega-house with plans to build up to 10 more, all sited within a half-square mile area. The CAFOs are also impacting the safety and health of local institutions, residing within walking distance of local schools and several churches.

The CLF letter warns of the substantial public health risks unregulated industrial animal operations can bring to local communities, confirming public concerns being voiced by Environmental Defense of Gordon County and local residents opposed to the industrial operations.

Among the risks are disease transmission brought on by manure run-off depositing harmful pathogens into recreational water and drinking water sources. CLF confirms that 16% of Gordon County residents rely on private wells for drinking water and household use, risking potential exposure to waterborne diseases. Exposure to the air pollutants CAFOs spew into the local atmosphere, including high levels of ammonia and volatile organic compounds, can cause or worsen respiratory conditions such as asthma, bronchitis and allergic reactions.

CLF also cites the fact that massive amounts of manure from the operations can contaminate ground and surface waters with nitrates, drug residues and other hazards, creating multiple health risks to residents that include cancer, birth defects and other reproductive problems, and thyroid problems.

“Protecting the health, ecology, and quality of life in Gordon County has to be the first priority of the Commissioners,” said Genell Pridgen of the national nonprofit [Socially Responsible Agricultural Project \(SRAP\)](#). “CLF has provided scientific information and expertise that must be taken seriously on the real-world impacts of an industry that treats the air, water and soil of rural America like a dumping ground. Local officials need to get educated now on the risks of CAFOs and possible solutions if there is any hope for these citizens.”

The next steps for Gordon County include an upcoming public meeting reviewing the Commissioners’ findings on the current County commercial poultry operations ordinance with an opportunity for the public to make comments. That gathering was recently postponed and will be rescheduled due to the recent bird flu outbreak.

Copies of the Johns Hopkins/Center for a Livable Future letter are available by request.

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About Socially Responsible Agricultural Project (SRAP)

SRAP is a national nonprofit organization working in rural communities across the country on the front lines of factory farm expansion. SRAP provides no-cost engineering, technical, educational, organizational and communications support, assisting citizens in the protection of their homes and the preservation of responsible family farming and ranching. For more information, go to www.sraproject.org.