



University of Wisconsin  
Department of Orthopedics & Rehabilitation

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December 12, 2020

Dear Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Leadership,

I am a physician at the University of Wisconsin and a resident of District 14 in the village of Steuben. I am writing to express my support for the request for an environmental impact statement regarding the Roth Feed Pig II concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) in Crawford County. My family's home is immediately below the proposed site, and as a pediatrician I am unfortunately well aware of the potential health risks associated with the water and air contamination that can result from this type of operation. I was very happy when the Crawford County Board initially agreed to a moratorium last year to better study the potential impact of an operation this size, but unfortunately that study was ultimately not able to be conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, Mr. Roth continues to press forward with plans to build his large CAFO despite the potential detrimental impacts. In my opinion, ***the establishment of CAFOs in Crawford County, particularly in light of the vulnerable local geology, represents a significant potential health risk to the local population.***

While I make my living in health care, this is also very personal for our family. We purchased our home in Crawford County so that our children could experience the natural world and we could not find anywhere that would be more suitable for this than the Driftless region. They walk the woods, climb trees, track animals, run through the prairie, and swim in the Kickapoo River. When we learned of a proposed CAFO development site immediately above us on Harvest Lane, I was horrified. I have seen how devastating contaminant illnesses can be. I have cared for children in the ICU with these diseases, praying that they would survive. The idea that this beautiful area could be spoiled by this type of operation is hard to fathom. Of course I'm wary of the reduction of our property values, the pollution of waterways, the increased traffic, the ambient noise and the terrible smell. ***But the possibility that my children's health could be threatened by the air we breathe, the well water we drink, or the river they play in seems incomprehensible.***

As I'm sure you are aware, the potential environmental impacts of housing such large numbers of animals in a small space are significant and ***the Centers for Disease Control have outlined a wide range of negative health impacts of this type of agriculture.*** The sheer volume of manure generated often exceeds its capacity for use as a fertilizer, and storage units such as pits, treatment lagoons or holding ponds can break or overflow. In any of these instances, the runoff of highly toxic volumes of manure into the groundwater or surface water results in significant risk of infection for those living in the immediate area. This risk may be even greater in areas of Karstic geology such as ours, which include fractured bedrock and sinkholes that facilitate the contamination of groundwater with manure from CAFOs. As you know, ***even operations with functioning containment systems can be overwhelmed by heavy storms or floods, both of which have been increasingly common in our area in the last few years.***

For those of us in Steuben, this means contamination of well water, rivers, lakes, and streams with a number of human toxins, including *Escheria Coli*, *Bacillus Anthracis*, *Giardia lamblia*, *Salmonella* species, and others. While any of these can result in significant gastrointestinal illness, infection with *E. Coli* is particularly dangerous, as the toxins released by the bacteria result in persistent bloody diarrhea and vomiting, dehydration, malnutrition, and even death if untreated. Hemolytic uremic syndrome, a known complication of *E. Coli* infection, results in breakdown of red blood cells, kidney failure, and potentially death. ***If you have not cared for a child with this disease, it is hard to imagine how awful this contaminant illness can be.***

CAFOs also increase the risk of airborne illness. Ammonia, hydrogen sulfide and particulate matter that result from the concentration of large amounts of manure can result in respiratory irritation and chronic lung disease, including asthma in children. In addition to the obvious impacts on overall quality of life, decreased air quality as a result of these pollutants can be particularly dangerous to vulnerable populations such as infants, the elderly, and individuals with underlying cardiorespiratory disease. Ammonia taken up by the soil can be converted to nitrates. Nitrate poisoning from elevated levels in drinking water can lead to methemoglobinemia, a condition in which blood cannot carry sufficient oxygen. ***This can result in "blue baby syndrome" and death in infants, as well as increase the risks of birth defects, miscarriages and even certain types of cancer.***

Despite Mr. Roth's claims that we are a group of politicized, radical, anti-farming activists, this is simply not true. We are his neighbors and our concerns are about the potential risks of concentrating animals in a way that the land cannot tolerate. It is about protecting the health and well-being of the people living in the shadow of his proposed CAFO. I hope that you will consider this environmental impact statement so that we can better define and consider the effect that CAFOs can have on the health of the families that live in our area.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if there is any other information that I can provide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Watson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Watson, MD, MS

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