Expansion of Barry County Industrial Dairy with Violations History Goes Unchallenged by MDEQ

State agency won’t act on community concerns about facility adding 900 animals and generating 5,402,597 additional gallons of manure

Lansing, MI—The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) has allowed an industrial dairy operation in Barry County to expand by 40% despite an illegal discharge of waste into West Gilkey Lake in 2015 that led to a fine and consent order. More than four dozen comments were submitted to the MDEQ last fall objecting to the proposed addition of 900 dairy cows by Prairie View Dairy LLC, a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) in Prairieville Township. In addition to past environmental violations, comments cited many other concerns, including:

- Significant risk to Crooked Lake and other waters based on CAFO’s large storage volumes, minimal buffering area, and close vicinity to lakes and wetlands of high value for habitat and fishing
- Potential for high nitrate levels in drinking water wells
- Limited fields available to spread waste
- Need for increased monitoring to ensure Prairie View’s waste management practices do not threaten surrounding lakes and land.

Despite the community’s concerns, in MDEQ’s Responsiveness Summary issued four months after the close of comments, the agency claimed it did not consider such a massive expansion and increase in the production of untreated livestock wastes by almost 5.5 million gallons per year to be significant enough to warrant reconsideration of the facility’s permit conditions. Prairie View is covered under a Michigan General CAFO National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit instead of an individual permit, which could include stricter requirements for monitoring, reporting and design of the facility.

“Gov. Snyder may be gone, but the legacy of his MDEQ and its approach to favoring polluters lives on,” said Gail Philbin, director of Sierra Club’s Michigan Chapter. “You see it in Michigan’s struggling rural communities and compromised waterways, which are substantially
less protected from the public health threat of hundreds of polluting factory farms that operate with impunity across the state.”

The increase at Prairie View means it will generate 27,610,432 gallons of waste per year, an annual increase of 5,402,597 gallons in a lake-filled region of the state already saturated with CAFOs and animal waste. Across Michigan, animal waste from nearly 300 CAFOs frequently makes its way into waterways, leading to a host of environmental and health problems.

Manure feeds the algae blooms that plague our inland waters and was a key factor in the growth of the toxic algae that poisoned drinking water for Toledo and southern Michigan in 2014. Water and soil pollution can occur at any point in a dairy operation, including from over-application of waste to fields of manure slurry containing untreated feces, urine, disease-causing bacteria, anti-biotics, and hazardous chemicals such as ammonia and methane.

Sierra Club has been at the forefront of battling CAFO pollution in Michigan for nearly three decades. To learn more, visit sierraclub.org/michigan/why-are-cafos-bad

For more information about CAFOs and what you can do to fight back, email gail.philbin@sierraclub.org

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