February 8, 2018

Dear Iowa General Assembly Member:

The 55 undersigned organizations urge you to support enactment of a legislative moratorium on new and expanded factory farms in Iowa.

Iowa is in the midst of a serious water pollution crisis. For several decades, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state governments have failed to regulate the environmental impacts of factory farms, and the resulting impacts on Iowa’s waterways are some of the worst in the nation. The vast quantities of manure generated by the state’s factory farms — 22 billion gallons annually — are applied to fields at rates that far exceed crops’ ability to absorb them, and the excess runs off into rivers and streams.

750 water bodies in Iowa — over half of those tested — were found to be impaired in 2014 and the vast majority of those are impairments are from pollutants and conditions associated with factory farms, including E. coli, excessive algal growth and diminished aquatic life. Iowa’s largest water utility, the Des Moines Water Works, struggles to provide clean drinking water for Des Moines residents because of the excessive amount of nitrates discharged from the thousands of factory hog farms in counties upstream. Nitrates pose a serious public health threat, and over 60 additional cities and towns in Iowa have experienced high nitrate levels in their drinking water during the last five years.

This huge amount of manure doesn’t respect state boundaries — it ultimately flows downstream until it reaches the Gulf of Mexico, where it contributes to a ‘dead zone’ the size of New Jersey.

Iowa’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR), charged with regulating this industry, doesn’t even have accurate records of how many factory farms exist in Iowa. Over the past several years, DNR has used satellite images to identify 5,063 potential livestock confinement buildings that they previously did not even know existed — factory farms that are completely unaccounted for in the state’s records. The agency still does not know how many are large enough to require permits or inspections, or which ones may be adding to the state’s water pollution problems.

Local communities have very little influence in the permitting of new or expanded factory

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2 http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Water-Quality/Water-Monitoring/Impaired-Waters
3 Donnelle Eller, High Nitrates Plague 60 Iowa Cities, Data Show, Des Moines Register (July 4, 2015).
5 See 2016 Annual Report for Work Plan Agreement Between the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Environmental Protection Agency Region 7, IOWA DNR 5 (Aug. 1, 2016)
farms. The “Master Matrix,” a scoring mechanism intended to give communities input in the permitting process and protect communities and the environment, is so weak that in its 15 year existence all but 2% of proposals have passed. A passing score on the Master Matrix is 50% — an “F” by any other standard. As a result, Iowa’s factory farm permitting program is failing Iowa’s communities. Family farmers and rural residents are often left feeling like prisoners in their own homes, unable to hold family gatherings or hang laundry outside to dry due to the overwhelming stench and air pollution. Retirees are left with the realization that their homes and properties — often their nest eggs — are depreciated due to the decline in property values associated with living next to a factory farm. Research has shown that Iowans living near factory farms are more likely to experience respiratory problems, headaches, diarrhea, burning eyes, nausea, and more serious health problems as a result of factory farm air pollution.

Nearly 25% of Iowa counties, both rural and urban, have passed resolutions in favor of stronger local control or a legislative moratorium on new and expanded factory farms. Conversations about stopping expansion of industrialized agriculture began among citizen organizations, but are finally becoming mainstream. Iowa’s largest and most influential newspaper, the Des Moines Register, recently editorialized in favor of a moratorium.

Iowans have exhausted all of their options in trying to rein in this industry, which has wreaked havoc on communities and drinking water. A moratorium will give legislators an overdue opportunity to evaluate the public health, economic and societal impacts of factory farms while providing Iowa’s communities with important statutory protections from further expansion of this industry.

We urge Iowa Senators and Representatives to co-sponsor and support legislative proposals for a moratorium on new and expanded factory farms in Iowa.

Sincerely,

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6 Animal Feeding Operations Database, IOWA DNR, https://programs.iowadnr.gov/animalfeedingoperations/ (Select “Reports,” then “Construction Review Activity,” and sort the “Matrix Required” column to remove facilities categorized as “No” or “Not Assigned (default)”) (last visited June 5, 2017).


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