

## Why the factory farm issue matters

**“Only when the last tree has died; and the last river been poisoned; and the last fish been caught will we realize that we cannot eat money.”**

...19th Century Cree Indian saying

One of the most important issues confronting agricultural communities in the U.S. — perhaps the most important issue — is the future structure of the livestock industry. The issue is whether animals will be raised on diversified, sustainable family farms, or produced in large, energy and capital-intensive confinement facilities (i.e. factory farms) that concentrate the animals and their wastes in vast quantities and concentrate economic control in the hands of absentee investors.

## What’s at stake

### The future of our environment and health:

- **The quality of our water** – A *Des Moines Register*<sup>1</sup> analysis reported that Iowa has some of the most polluted waters in the country, primarily from fecal bacteria, nitrogen and phosphorous. Since 1996, there have been over 800 reported manure spills, with the majority coming from factory farms. A USDA study<sup>2</sup> shows that factory farm owners knowingly over-applied liquid manure on land closest to their operations to reduce transportation costs.
  - At levels above 10 milligrams per liter, nitrates, a common water pollutant from agricultural runoff, can cause human health risks. Children under five years of age, the elderly, and people with suppressed immune systems are particularly at risk.
- **The effectiveness of our medicine**- Scientists believe over-use of antibiotics in animals to promote growth and control disease is decreasing the effectiveness of antibiotics in humans. It’s been estimated that 70% of all antibiotics in the U.S. are fed to healthy livestock merely to promote growth and compensate for unsanitary and confined conditions found on factory farms<sup>3</sup>.
  - The young and the elderly are especially at risk from resistant bacteria.
- **The quality of our health**– Factory farms emit over 200 gases, including hydrogen sulfide and ammonia which can cause serious health problems at certain levels.
  - Studies conducted in Iowa<sup>4</sup> and North Carolina<sup>5</sup> show that people living near factory farms are more likely to experience respiratory problems, headaches, diarrhea, burning eyes, nausea, and more serious health problems from factory farm air pollution.
  - The American Public Health Association passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on new factory farms citing health concerns among children, neighbors and workers<sup>6</sup>.
  - The Iowa DNR has monitored ammonia levels at Iowa factory farms that exceed safe health standards recommended by the University of Iowa/Iowa State University<sup>7</sup>.

### The prosperity of rural economies:

- **The economies of our towns**– Research shows that poverty levels rise in areas where there are a lot of factory farms. Studies also show that hog factories tend to hinder economic growth in rural communities<sup>8</sup>, create significantly fewer jobs as opposed to independent family farms,<sup>9</sup> and reduce the retail sales and per capita income of the community<sup>10</sup>.
  - This is of particular concern for seniors, many of who are on a fixed income with rising medical costs.
- **The value of our homes** – Studies show that the sales values of homes tend to decline the closer the proximity to factory farms<sup>11</sup> Some families have been unable to sell their home at all.
  - Rural seniors often count on the value of their homes and property as a retirement fund. When they are unable to receive the expected compensation, their retirement benefits shrink or disappear completely.
- **The quality of our roads and bridges** – Manure tankers can do significant damage to our roads and bridges causing costly repairs that many counties can not afford<sup>12</sup>.
  - Poor roads are a detriment to seniors attempting to maintain their mobility.

## What We've Done

Our work on factory farm issues since the mid '90s has produced tangible results and given thousands of rural Iowans hope in their fight for social, economic and environmental justice. Our accomplishments include:

- **Stopped the construction of factory farms.**

Members organized around the state to stop the construction or expansion of more than 100 factory farms – keeping millions of gallons of toxic liquid manure out of our water.

- **Won greater local control over factory farms.**

Members helped counties challenge and overturn decisions by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to grant construction permits to factory farms.

- **Pushed the state to issue violations and fines for factory farm polluters.**

We successfully petitioned the DNR to issue stiff fines and penalties for factory farm polluters and to refer pollution cases to the Iowa Attorney General for stronger enforcement action.

- **Won implementation of the Federal Clean Water Act in Iowa.**

Through dynamic organizing, legal strategies, continued pressure and strategic planning we pushed EPA and DNR to sign a workplan in 2013, implement a Clean Water rule in 2014, and now members are working to make DNR use the rule and make it stronger.

- **Exposed corporate ag kingpins.**

Over the years, CCI members have made sure to expose corporate ag kingpins, like Bruce Rastetter, for profiting off and pushing policies that pollute Iowa's air, water and quality of life. We've also focused on exposing factory farm legislators, political appointments, and big corporate ag players.

- **Stopped bad factory farm bills from passing at the Statehouse**

CCI has a powerful Citizen Lobby Team that is the eyes and ears at the Statehouse to make sure we can stop any bad factory farm bill that is introduced. We've stopped ag gag laws, bans on nuisance lawsuits, deregulation of factory farm oversight, and dozens of other bills meant to give more power to the factory farm industry.

**"If society wants a means of producing food, then a few, large farms is one way to do it. But if society wants a clean, thriving rural place to live and work and raise children, then you have to rethink this formula."**  
-Cheryl Tevis, *Successful Farming Magazine*

**Family Farms, YES!**

**Factory Farms, NO!**

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<sup>1</sup> Beeman, Perry. "Rivers in Iowa among the nation's most highly polluted," Des Moines Register, March 24, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, "Manure Management for Water Quality, Costs to Animal Feeding Operations of Applying Manure Nutrients to Land," Agricultural Economic Report Number 824.

<sup>3</sup> Mellon, M., Benbrook, C., & Benbrook, K. (2000). Hogging it: Estimates of antimicrobial abuse in livestock. Cambridge, MA: Union of Concerned Scientists.

<sup>4</sup> University of Iowa/Iowa State University, Iowa Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations Air Quality Study, February 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Wing, Steve and Wolf, Susanne. "Intensive Livestock Operations, Health, and Quality of Life among Eastern North Carolina Residents," University of North Carolina, March 2000.

<sup>6</sup> American Public Health Association, Precautionary Moratorium on New Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, Resolution number 2003-7, November 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Iowa Department of Natural Resources analysis of hydrogen sulfide and ammonia data from AFO monitoring sites. 2004 and 2005, [www.iowadnr.com/air](http://www.iowadnr.com/air).

<sup>8</sup> Zang, L., Gomez, M. "Impacts of Concentration in Hog Production on Economic Growth in Rural Illinois: An Econometric Analysis." Illinois state University, April 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Ikerd, John. "Economic Impacts of Contract Hog Production in Missouri, An Alternative Viewpoint," Issues in Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Agriculture Systems Program, University of Missouri, March-April, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Thu, K.M., editor. 1996. Understanding the Impacts of Large-Scale Swine Production. Iowa City: The University of Iowa.

<sup>11</sup> Palmquist, R. B., Roka, F. M., & Vukina, T. Hog operations, environmental effects, and residential property values. *Land Economics*, 73, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Iowa Department of Transportation. "Protecting our bridges for the future," PM 778, April, 2006.