

Robert Valnes

To whom it may concern,

I have lived and worked in Stevens County my entire 83 years, and have been in the well drilling and water conditioning business for over 50 years. I know this ground. I know what's in it, what flows through it, and what it takes to protect it. I am writing in strong support of the proposed West River Dairy expansion near Morris.

Some people are throwing out big numbers about water usage and manure to scare folks who don't deal with these things for a living. I understand why it works. But I do deal with them, and I can tell you that a big number without context doesn't mean much.

The DNR does not hand out water permits because somebody asks nicely. They look hard at aquifer capacity, existing water users, and long-term sustainability before a single gallon can be appropriated. I have worked alongside that process for decades. It is not a formality. If the water couldn't support this in a sustainable way, the permit wouldn't be granted. Period.

The same is true on the manure side. The MPCA requires detailed nutrient management planning tied to actual field capacity, soil testing, and application timing. Done right, it's not a liability — it's an asset to the farmland surrounding this operation. I've seen it with my own eyes over many years. I wouldn't be writing this if I had any doubt about what this project means for our water and our land. I've spent my whole life trying to protect both and that's not something I would set aside for anyone.

But this is about more than water and land. People need to understand what an operation like this means for the local economy. Construction alone brings real work to local contractors, electricians, equipment operators, and suppliers. Once it's running, the ripple effect doesn't stop — those same service providers, along with farmers providing feed, harvest crews, and truckers all see activity that wouldn't exist otherwise. That is real money staying right here in Stevens County.

I've lived a good long life in this county and I have no complaints about that. But my biggest hope at this point isn't for myself - it's that the people coming up behind me have the same opportunities I did, and then some. Projects like this one, done the right way and with the right oversight, are how that happens. That's what I care about now.

I respectfully urge the MPCA to approve this expansion. Don't let large numbers without context cloud a process that has been done right. This community deserves the opportunity to grow, and this is the right way to do it.

Sincerely,

Robert Valnes

Morris, MN