

Joe Storlien

To the MPCA review committee,

The proposed expansion of West River Dairy near Morris raises significant concerns about the environmental and community impacts associated with such a large-scale livestock operation. Increasing the herd to nearly 19,000 cows would create one of the largest dairy facilities in Minnesota and dramatically increase the volume of manure generated and stored on site. Managing and land-applying hundreds of millions of gallons of manure each year presents meaningful risks to soil health, groundwater, and nearby waterways if nutrients are over-applied or if storage systems fail.

The project's projected water use—hundreds of millions of gallons annually—also raises important questions about the long-term sustainability of groundwater withdrawals in west-central Minnesota, particularly during drought conditions. Given the proximity of the operation to sensitive watersheds and conservation lands, there is a legitimate concern that nutrient runoff or other environmental impacts could affect nearby ecosystems and wildlife habitat.

In addition to environmental considerations, the scale of the project could alter the character of the local agricultural economy by further concentrating dairy production into very large operations, potentially placing additional pressure on smaller regional farms. Rural residents may also experience quality-of-life impacts associated with increased truck traffic, odors, and other by-products of an industrial-scale livestock facility.

Given the size and potential cumulative impacts of this project, it would be prudent to require a more comprehensive environmental review to ensure that all long-term effects on water resources, ecosystems, and rural communities are carefully evaluated before any expansion moves forward.

I grew up in southwest Minnesota and am a proponent of the agriculture community. I chose a career path as a soil scientist because of my love for agriculture and rural communities. This is not a pro- or anti-agricultural issue when weighing this decision. This is a common sense issue and is a fundamental question of what the future of agriculture could or should be. The proposed expansion of West River Dairy does not align with a long-term vision for a resilient and sustainable agricultural community in west-central Minnesota. Sustainable agriculture depends on systems that distribute opportunities broadly, protect shared natural resources, and support diverse, locally rooted farms. Expanding a single dairy operation to nearly 19,000 cows moves in the opposite direction by concentrating production, environmental risk, and economic power into one large corporate entity.

Rather than strengthening the fabric of rural agriculture, projects of this scale often accelerate consolidation and make it more difficult for smaller and mid-sized family farms to compete or remain viable. This model reflects the priorities of industrial agriculture and corporate capitalism—maximizing scale and efficiency—rather than building a diversified agricultural landscape that supports farmers, communities, and ecosystems over the long term.

If we are serious about the future of agriculture in Minnesota, we should be investing in systems that promote stewardship of soil and water, strengthen regional food economies, and create opportunities for many farmers rather than concentrating production in a few massive facilities. A project of this scale raises important questions about whether our agricultural development choices are guided by long-term sustainability or by short-term economic gain. At the very least, this project requires an EIS to give local residents a say in what kind of agriculture dominates their community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Storlien". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Joe Storlien, PhD  
Avon, Minnesota