

Bonnie Haugen

Bonnie Haugen comment on West River Dairy Expansion

Farming is Everybody's Bread, Butter, and Water. What I do on my hills affects water quality and quantity for Everybody.

I am a retired dairy farmer. Our family milked 100 – 200 cows 1994 until 2024. Due mostly to unstable and low milk prices, we ceased shipping milk and transitioned to a beef farm.

The pressure from the existing large Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) dairies is causing harm to our milk markets for many farmers. They can flood the market, tip the market to a monopoly, and create unfair financial pressure on the existing farms. That pressure makes the milk income price fluctuate and unsustainably low. Farm families quit milking or sell the farm business. Therefore, our towns receive less business, and the community struggles.

A Full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is needed.

I was a member of the Southeast Minnesota Nitrate Strategies Collaborative Work Group. I learned about water quality and quantity issues during our meetings July of 2024 through June of 2025. One of those issues which comes to mind when I think of this permit application is related to the feed for the 18,855 cows. Certainly, containing and spreading the liquid manure has many concerns for people's safety, the high risk of contaminating water, air, and ground. However, I was surprised to learn that it is raising the feed that often causes more of a nitrogen problem. Corn, a major feed component of dairy cows, is a monoculture crop. When nitrogen is applied, its easily overapplied. Further, in these unprecedented weather events, a farmer may apply nitrogen pellets in good faith, but a rain of surprise timing and deluge can wash it away, polluting our water and giving the farmer cause to apply more fertilizer, risking more nitrogen going into our drinking water. Cover cropping, precision application, and following recommendations alleviate nitrate runoff and improves soil health. Yet, following regulations does not always protect our environment. Weather events can cause catastrophic overflows, cracks or leaks in structures and hoses happen.

A Full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is needed to better minimize the huge risks this huge business proposes. The environment and people in that region and watershed deserve a EIS be conducted with integrity.

Water tables, aquifers, streams, creeks, pathways do not abide by township, county or state borders. This proposed expansion is within five miles of eight different waterfowl and wildlife production areas. Allowing the pumping of 226 million gallons of water every year needs study. Can the aquifer handle that much additional drawdown and not cause issues of quantity or quality for the existing towns, rural wells, farmland, and rivers? Can the watershed survive? I think a full study needs to be completed before a decision can be made on permitting this size of an industrial agriculture business.

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Manure lagoons and miles of hoses also give me concerns for people and water safety. Lagoons of these sizes can be very risky. Man made structures fail eventually. But even if not often, when a hose or lagoon of these sizes leaks, the pollution is not easily or quickly cleaned up. The risks of this size need extra special study before permitting.

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There are not other CAFO's of this huge size in our state. There are studies showing the social and economic effects of CAFO's on our communities. Should we assume that those same effects will be the same except the impact will be huge, as the CAFO is huge? We should not make uneducated and unresearched guesses before allowing a permit for this size CAFO.

A Full Environmental Impact Statement is needed.

Thank you for your needed attention to this critical nature of this threat to our environment and people.

Respectfully,
Bonnie Haugen