

Concerned Farmers and Neighbors of the Town of Hixton

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Hixton Citizens Ask DNR For Public Hearing On 3,000 Cow Feedlot Expansion

Hixton, WI - A group of farmers and neighbors in the Town of Hixton today asked the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to hold a public hearing on the DNR's proposal to issue a permit to discharge water pollution by one of the largest livestock factories in Jackson County.

“My family and I live near this operation, and I’m worried about the groundwater contamination that could result from allowing the cattle waste to simply pile up on that dirt lot,” said Mike Helstad, a farmer and meat processor requesting the public hearing. “My well is already contaminated with nitrates, and now I’m afraid it’s going to get worse.”

The DNR is proposing to issue the permit to Sedelbauer Farms, Inc. to confine approximately 3,000 dairy heifers in partially enclosed open front sheds and a thirty acre open dirt lot. The thousands of cattle will be allowed to wander the dirt lot, but Sedelbauer Farms, Inc. will not be required to dispose of the thousands of tons of animal waste that will accumulate there. Instead, the waste will pile up on the dirt lot indefinitely, or until rain washes it into the groundwater or a nearby dirt pit adjacent to a stream.

The local community group, which is calling itself Concerned Farmers and Neighbors of the Town of Hixton, is concerned about the safety of their drinking water and that nearby rivers and streams may be polluted by runoff from the open dirt lot. The facility proposes to spread manure almost daily, even on frozen ground in the winter.

“The manure pits at the facility only have one or two days worth of capacity to store the manure,” said Andrew Hanson, an attorney with Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc. who is representing the group. “Spreading this manure on frozen ground on a daily basis will almost certainly cause runoff to nearby streams that can ruin water quality and cause fish kills,” he added.

Two of the water bodies that could be impacted by this livestock factory are Tank Creek and the Trempeleau River, both valuable streams for trout fishing given special protection under state law.

“I trout fish in the Trempeleau River, and I’m concerned about potential runoff from the livestock factory,” said Jeff German, a neighboring landowner and avid outdoorsman.

The group is requesting that the DNR require Sedelbauer Farms, Inc. to:

- * remove the cattle from the thirty acre dirt lot, or to at least require removal of the thousands of tons of animal waste that will accumulate on the lot;
- * require groundwater monitoring wells to detect the rate and extent of any groundwater pollution from the facility; and
- * prohibit Sedelbauer Farms, Inc. from spreading manure on frozen ground to prevent runoff to area streams and creeks.