

Testimony of Doug Doughty

before the

House Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on Environment

July 19, 2022

Chairman Khanna, Ranking Member Norman, and members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Doug Doughty. I'm a row crop farmer and livestock producer from Livingston County, Missouri. My wife, Barb, and I grow corn, soybeans, and hay along with a cow/calf operation.

I serve on the local Jackson Township board, the Livingston County Health Center Board of Trustees, the Livingston County Zoning Adjustment board, the Missouri River Bird Observatory board of directors, Missouri Coalition for the Environment advisory committee, a member of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center and serve on the Livingston County USDA Farm Service Agency's county committee.

I moved back to our family farm in 1984 and started farming during a crisis that devastated many rural communities in Missouri and across the country. I witnessed the widespread loss of small, but productive and community-minded, local family livestock and crop operations. Shortly afterwards, another crisis was unfolding and is continuing to gain strength today -- The proliferation of large-scale, industrial CAFOs.

This is evident over my 38 years of farming: 1) Industrial agriculture nutrient pollution that's due to runoff and leaching of animal manure and commercial fertilizer from our fields is increasing, and 2) The proliferation of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), both posing environmental threats to not only our rural communities, but our urban neighbors and even affecting the Gulf of Mexico.

Here's what we know. There is less topsoil, more carbon in the air, and more agriculture-related greenhouse gas emissions than there was yesterday. While overall methane emissions have declined since 1990, agriculture-related methane emissions have risen, including a 71% increase from manure management. The EPA tied this growth of manure-related methane and nitrous oxide emissions to the factory farm system of hog and dairy production.

The sophisticated CAFO industry is highly dependent on cheap feed and avoiding environmental regulations. Unfortunately, a tour of Midwest agriculture reveals a troubling list of environmental impacts from a system that's pushing Earth, farmers, and animals to their limits. Recent Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin assessments show a multitude of waterbodies impaired with bacteria, nitrates, and phosphates.

A recent Missouri Department of Natural Resources report shows 256 streams and rivers, plus 100 lakes are impaired. The cause, as noted by the DNR? Eighty percent agriculture related.

More than 1,500 miles of Wisconsin streams and rivers, and 33 lakes in nine counties assessed have impaired waters due overwhelmingly to pollution from manure and commercial fertilizer. In four counties, nitrogen from manure and fertilizer is applied at more than 50% above the rates recommended by University of Wisconsin to minimize pollution.

In Iowa, about 56% of their assessed rivers and streams and 67% of assessed lakes and reservoirs have impairments. DNR also states 92% of the nitrogen and 80% of phosphates in the state's waterways come from farms and animal feedlots.

Illinois: Aimed to reduce nitrates and nitrogen by 15% and phosphorus by 25% by 2025, but the latest update showed that nutrient loss increased by 13% and phosphorus losses increased by 35%, compared with a baseline period from 1980 to 1996, according to the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Implementation Biennial Report. The state is making headway on reducing nutrient discharge from wastewater treatment facilities. But the same reductions have not been seen in agriculture.

The tour ends on a positive note in Minnesota: 96% of all land parcels adjacent to public waterways in the state are in compliance with Minnesota's Buffer Law, established in 2017, requiring 50' buffer zones on land along public waterways and 16' buffer zones on land along public ditches. Buffers reduce erosion and help prevent water pollution by filtering nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment before runoff reaches waterways, according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Proof that effective regulation doesn't require an overhaul of the entire system.

We raise cattle on our farm, I grew up raising hogs and was a pork producer in my early years of farming, so I understand what is involved in raising animals for food. But what CAFOs do is different than what we do on our farm. Buildings the size of two or three football fields concentrate thousands or tens of thousands of animals and create massive quantities of manure; some similar to large cities that is challenging to be handled responsibly with a limited land base, putting surface and ground water at risk of contamination.

We need more effective CAFO regulations to counter this massive environmental impact. It's past time to regulate the waste and air pollution. Let's bring nitrogen and phosphorous inputs in line with crop needs...an easy and inexpensive way to improve water quality. Let's stop overapplying manure and commercial fertilizer so the excess is not washed away. In 2016, the EPA identified phosphate and nitrogen farm runoff as a serious threat to the public's health and called for identifying those responsible.

Livingston County was one of 20 counties in Missouri to enact local health regulations to govern CAFOs. Our health ordinance, established in 1997, did not ban CAFOs, but was stronger than Missouri's regulations. But our county health ordinances fell victim to intense lobbying from

corporate agriculture in 2019, the latest domino to fall in a series of laws that have been passed to deregulate the CAFO industry since the 1990s.

We were trying to take a reasonable approach to regulating facilities like CAFOs, but the attack on “local control” takes that tool away. And our Missouri state government, commandeered by corporate agriculture, has eroded state protections and regulations on CAFOs to the lowest common denominator- the baseline created by EPA. They describe these efforts to weaken state rules as "coming in line with federal regulations."

Shortly after the overturn of our health ordinance, our neighborhood was forced to resist a 10,500 head industrial-sized sow CAFO from being built near the 6,000-acre Poosey Conservation Area. We were concerned about the impact it would have on the neighborhood dealing with air and water pollution, flies, noise, and heavy truck traffic. Also, the burden on our already deteriorating state highways and graveled, county roads. And finally, the potential harm to the conservation area, an important public land/natural resource that is a destination for people from around the region.

We were also concerned that this proposed CAFO was going to raise feeder pigs on contract to a multinational corporation, JBS, which is the largest meatpacker in the world. JBS is headquartered in Brazil. How do we hold them accountable? Other communities in Missouri deal with the same concerns because of industrial CAFO operations run by Smithfield, now owned by a company based in China. China and Brazil get the pork. We get the manure and environmental issues.

The permit was withdrawn, but we know this is likely not the last proposed industrial CAFO for our area. Missouri seems determined to help this industry set up shop with minimal protections. Recently, the Missouri DNR changed the definition of groundwater by exempting “perched water table” from regulation. This was during the process of the proposed Livingston County CAFO permit being considered. Shallow groundwater was found on the proposed CAFO site. Often, in North Missouri, perched groundwater is the only source of fresh and potable groundwater that is reasonably available. This definition change made by DNR only applies to CAFOs, not other industries, such as landfills and mines, which shows the power of the CAFO industry in our state.

But federal regulations of CAFOs are weak. The EPA does not have the regulations in place to protect us from CAFOs, nor the political will to improve them. Because of the work of the industrial agriculture industry in Missouri’s legislature and regulatory system, EPA is the last line of defense for our communities.

Odor, air and water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, blacktop and county road deterioration, property value decline, health issues and rural exodus are predictable byproducts of CAFO proliferation. This is not opportunity for our communities. Instead, it accelerates the trend of a declining rural population, and we see schools, small businesses, family farms, and hospitals closing and/or consolidating. Missouri is teeming with natural history that is maintained with taxpayer dollars. Why should we let operations like the one proposed for my county to threaten not only our neighbors, but also treasured public lands?

On a positive note, farmers markets, farmers selling directly to consumers, farm-to-table restaurant initiatives, urban ag projects, and neighborhood kitchen and grocery initiatives are rapidly increasing. Shouldn't more emphasis be placed supporting this resourcefulness? And finally, the current system of corporate and commodity agriculture is heavily supported with public dollars. Shouldn't this support come with a responsibility to serve the public good?