

My name is Peg Sheaffer. I live in rural Brodhead in far southwestern Rock County with my husband and 3 kids. I'm here today to tell you how water quality issues have affected me and my community.

In 2016, I was driving home from the grocery store when my best friend Jen, who lives on the other side of town, called me in tears. She went on to explain that a man from Nebraska had just showed up in her driveway to inform her that he intended to build, right across the road, a confinement facility for 5,800 dairy cows and 4 manure pits to store the 85 million gallons of manure that those cows would produce every year.

Over the course of the months and years since that phone call, we have cried together over this issue on more occasions than I care to remember. And over the course of many late-night conversations—after the chores were done, and after the kids were in bed—we have talked and worried about the fate of her 4<sup>th</sup> generation family farm and the health of her 3 young daughters.

During the last several years, I have struggled to come up with any words to assure her that everything will be ok. I have searched in vain for evidence to indicate that this CAFO really doesn't pose the threat to her family's drinking water that she fears.

What would you say to her?

Maybe you'd say, don't worry, Jen. CAFO operators are the most highly regulated farmers in the state.

This might be a comfort, except that Wisconsin's legislative audit bureau released a report the same year as that fateful phone call which documented a significant decrease in DNR monitoring and enforcement of the CAFO program between 2005 and 2015, a time when the number of CAFOs in Wisconsin increased dramatically.

It seems to me that regulation sure doesn't mean much if you deny agencies the resources they need to enforce those regulations.

Maybe you'd reassure Jen by reminding her that CAFOs are zero-discharge facilities according to the terms of their permits. The problem there is that the zero-discharge standard only applies to CAFO production sites—meaning the buildings and the manure pits—and not to the thousands of acres on which a CAFO's manure is spread.

In fact, as you know, DNR has been legally prohibited from requiring monitoring of the groundwater that flows under any of those spreading fields. So you can see how the zero-discharge argument might prove to be cold comfort for someone like Jen whose home is surrounded by CAFO spreading fields.

For a while Jen and I took some comfort in something you often hear: “Nobody cares more about their land and their water than farmers.”

This is true in many, many cases. I, myself, have farmed with my husband for twenty years, and we’re passionate about protecting soil health and water quality. It stands to reason that all farmers, even CAFO operators, will do what’s best for our soil and water, right?

That’s what we tried to tell ourselves until the day in 2017 when we learned that the operators of the CAFO across the road were responsible for a massive manure spill at a CAFO they own in another county. It went unreported for months until it came to light as the result of an anonymous tip.

The reason I say this is not to vilify this particular CAFO operator, but to make the point that an approach to clean water that relies on industry to do the right thing--whether it’s manufacturing or agriculture—is not a good approach. The best way to protect water is to require true accountability from all industries, including the CAFO industry. That means third-party monitoring and enforcement, not voluntary compliance and self-reporting.

Like Jen, I am a mother doing my best to raise healthy children in a complicated world. We don’t have a special interest group to represent us. We don’t have paid lobbyists to advocate for our interests at the capital. We have you, our elected representatives. And we need you to make good laws to protect our water. We need you to give our state agencies the tools they require to enforce those laws.

I wish it hadn’t been necessary for me to come here today and make this plea. I wish this issue hadn’t become so politicized. Most of all, I wish there were something I could tell my best friend that would help her sleep better at night.

Thank you.