

Manure report cites 'massive regulatory failure'



Adam Rodewald, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

6:16 p.m. CDT June 10, 2015



(Photo: File/Gannett Wisconsin Media)

Weak regulatory oversight has allowed large-scale farms to "spiral out of control" and pollute groundwater without consequences, advocacy groups claim in a [new report](http://sraproject.org/pdfs/SRAP_rapsheet_2015.pdf) (http://sraproject.org/pdfs/SRAP_rapsheet_2015.pdf) released Wednesday.

The report's authors accuse the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources of giving "tacit approval" for pollution by ignoring evidence of [widespread spills](http://story/news/investigations/2015/02/06/manure-spills-water-supply/22983669/) ([/story/news/investigations/2015/02/06/manure-spills-water-supply/22983669/](http://story/news/investigations/2015/02/06/manure-spills-water-supply/22983669/)), intentional discharges and the over-spreading of manure.

The report focuses on 16 large dairy and beef farms, referred to as concentrated animal feeding operations, in Kewaunee County, where some studies suggest one-third of private drinking wells are contaminated with

nitrites, E. coli and other harmful bacteria.

RELATED: [Read the report](http://sraproject.org/pdfs/SRAP_rapsheet_2015.pdf) (http://sraproject.org/pdfs/SRAP_rapsheet_2015.pdf)

"We should not mince words about this. This is nothing short of a public health emergency. What we're talking about are Third-World conditions in America's heartland," said Scott Dye, a field associate with the Oregon-based Socially Responsible Agricultural Project.

A DNR spokesman said the agency is working with Kewaunee County residents and other stakeholders on solutions to reduce risks to public health and groundwater quality.

"We are regulating within the full authority we have within the current laws and rules. However, we are continuing to work to come to potential suggestions for the Legislature," DNR Spokesman Bill Cosh said.

State and local advocacy groups spent more than a year reviewing about 6,000 state and federal records summarized in the 137-page report, "The Rap Sheets," released at a press conference in Green Bay.

"What did we find? A repeated pattern of an industry that has simply spiraled out of control, and a state agency that has done nothing more than take raw notes while raw manure continues to pour into the county's rivers, wetlands, lakes, Like Michigan itself and into rural family's drinking water supplies," said Dye.

The report also claims the DNR follows an "all carrots, no stick" oversight policy that ignores a "blatant disregard" for permits, neglects to enforce manure management plans and fails to uniformly track [manure spills or other violations](http://story/news/local/2015/02/19/budget-cuts-affect-manure-spills-runoff-mitigation/23709505/) ([/story/news/local/2015/02/19/budget-cuts-affect-manure-spills-runoff-mitigation/23709505/](http://story/news/local/2015/02/19/budget-cuts-affect-manure-spills-runoff-mitigation/23709505/)).

A spokesman for the Dairy Business Association of Wisconsin said the report is inaccurate and quotes selectively from documents to make its case.

"It's unfortunate that this group has chosen to irresponsibly hurl accusations against farmers. This does nothing to foster solutions, if that is the group's true goal," said Jamie Mara, the organization's director of public relations.

The report was written by SRAP in partnership with Family Farm Defenders and Kewaunee Citizens Advocating Responsible Environmental Stewardship, also known as Kewaunee CARES.

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"We have people who cannot drink their water, brush their teeth, wash their dishes and are fearful of bathing in their water if they have an open cut," said Lynn Utesch, a grass-fed beef farmer and co-founder of Kewaunee CARES.

"The massive regulatory failures of the DNR have real consequences," Utesch said.

Environmental groups petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency in October to exercise emergency powers under the Safe Drinking Water Act to intervene in Kewaunee County. The groups also requested the federal agency [investigate one farm \(/story/news/local/2015/04/08/kinnard-farms-accused-polluting-wells/25463395/\)](#), Kinnard Farms Inc., which they accuse of causing the worst pollution.

Lee Kinnard, the owner of the 4,000-cow dairy farm, said he believes the groups are manipulating groundwater research to further their agenda. He said his farm is at the forefront of science-based farming practices.

"What people tend to forget is, this is my backyard, my family's backyard and it has been for generations," he said. "My family absolutely considers ourselves conservationists, and we put our money where our mouth is."

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