

Bonnie Haugen's written testimony at Subcommittee on Mn. Water Policy Hearing on November 14, 2023

"Farming is Everybody's Bread Butter and Water"

I am Bonnie Haugen, dairy farmer, RAKC (Responsible Ag in Karst Country) member, and LSP (Land Stewardship Project) member.

I have water to my house and water for my dairy livestock. I am thankful. Over the years, we have milked anywhere from 75 – 225 cows. These last years we have milked about 170 cows.

My water looks clean, smells good, and according to tests, is safe enough. Even so, I am worried.

In 2008 my well nitrate level was 6.5. In 2018 my well nitrate level was 7.3. In May of 2022 my well nitrate level was 8.99. I will test again soon.

I am a grazing dairy farmer. We purchased our 230 acres by Canton in 1993, and these acres have been covered with mixed forages the last 30 years, a practice recognized for good water and environmental benefits, yet I see our nitrate level is on the rise. Water mooooves easily and doesn't stay within fence lines, township lines, county lines or state lines. Therefore, I assume the water coming up my pipes has moved through other acres first.

Placing a moratorium on CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) in our karst region is not anti-ag, it is a needed caution. A moratorium does not undermine the existing CAFOs, it simply puts a pause on new or expanding CAFOs, giving time to evaluate the water contamination issue.

I am a dairy farmer, and I can empathize with the frustration of more regulations. Some regulations are worth the hassle, such as slow-moving vehicle signage. I am not frustrated with the farmers themselves, but I am angry with the systems thrust upon us that unfairly favor CAFOs. Getting bigger is not always better. Most often, it is the consolidated and large ag companies that financially benefit the most from the milk, meat, and input markets.

I do not want to pay for my neighbor's water, but if I have polluted the water for local society, then why shouldn't I be held accountable for my part in the water degradation? We do not want manufacturing companies to be dumping contaminants in our waters, and CAFOs, are more like animal factories than a mid-sized farm. If the animal agriculture in southeastern Minnesota is devastated, it is because of the current consolidation pressures more than a moratorium to pause CAFO expansions. In light of the recent EPA ruling, I ask this committee to be supportive in it's actions.

Any farm producing milk, meat, fiber, food, oils, or more should be held accountable if they pollute the resources of water and air that we all use. If a farm is not damaging our water, then following additional regulations will not be a major business obstacle.

When a water drop lands on your head, either in the shower or from the sky, I challenge you to remember this:

That water drop may have previously landed on my cow's back, fallen down on the grass, soaked into the ground, and followed a karst crack into the St. Peter aquifer. Then my neighbor's confined cow drank it and passed it on into their slurry store, then out on the corn field. But before it could soak through the dry crust, it was carried with a deluge into the stream, the creek, the river, the ocean, then evaporated to the sky where it connected with other drops while floating in the wind currents, being carried over your head, clinging to other rain drops and getting too heavy, so it drops on you.

We shouldn't need to be worried with the safety of our water. We are all so interconnected.....what I do on my hills does affect water quality and quantity for all of society.

(Bonnie plans to raise a glass of water here).

I am a dairy farmer. I am a RAKC member. I am a LSP member. Indeed, we should have more livestock on the land.

I believe that "Farming is Everybody's Bread, Butter and Water".

Thank you,

Bonnie Haugen

Canton, Mn.