

Clean Wisconsin: Seeks to intervene in Dairy Business Association lawsuit

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Clean Wisconsin defends safeguards preventing water pollution from CAFOs

MADISON, WI —Clean Wisconsin today filed a Motion to Intervene in a Dairy Business Association (DBA) lawsuit which attacks safeguards that protect surface water and groundwater from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) pollution.

“Clean Wisconsin is taking action to prevent water pollution from large industrial farms, which produce massive volumes of manure that can pose significant risks to our water resources if mishandled,” said Evan Feinauer, Clean Wisconsin staff attorney. “DBA’s lawsuit is an attempt by one part of the farming community to undermine the CAFO wastewater permitting system, instead of working with the DNR to address specific concerns.”

Large industrial farms have come under increased public scrutiny in Wisconsin and across the country because of their impacts on water quality. A farm with 2,500 animals produces at much waste as a city with roughly 400,000 residents per year.

“If DBA wins this lawsuit, it would effectively blow up the CAFO permitting system,” said Feinauer. “There would be major impacts to surface water quality, groundwater quality and public health throughout the state, if large CAFOs are not required to obtain permits to prevent water pollution.”

This lawsuit comes at a time when cooperative efforts are already underway to

address groundwater contamination stemming from agricultural sources. In Kewaunee County, where water in over 30% of private wells is undrinkable due in large part to contamination from livestock pollution, 16 CAFO's spread hundreds of millions of gallons of liquid manure every year. Collaboration between the farming community, environmental organizations, and state agencies have led to proposed rule changes on manure spreading practices to address longstanding groundwater contamination.

"DBA's lawsuit is disappointing given our extensive work with the agricultural community to find solutions that reduce water pollution that work for everyone," said Scott Laeser, Clean Wisconsin water program director. "This lawsuit is inconsistent with those productive efforts, and it's out of step with efforts by the broader farming community to protect Wisconsin's waterways and groundwater resources."

Clean Wisconsin's motion was filed jointly with Clean Water Action Council, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Milwaukee Riverkeeper, and Friends of the Central Sands in Brown County Circuit Court.