

# Wisconsin Dairy Alliance: Open your eyes

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CHILTON, WIS. – A recent article published in the Wisconsin State Journal portrayed a false perception regarding the impact of large permitted farms on the environment.

The article, headlined “Tony Evers, Republicans both looking to get factory farms to pay for cleaner water,” (by Steven Verburg) is highly slanted against Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO’s) and takes the stance that increasing the financial burden on these larger permitted farms would lead to a substantially cleaner water system.

The Wisconsin Dairy Alliance (WDA) fully supports actions taken to reduce pollution in our waterways. WDA agrees with the article in that designing permits, facility inspections and enforcement with compliance are all necessary elements of a clean water strategy. CAFO’s take protecting and improving water quality seriously. When a permitted dairy operation houses more than 700 cows for over 45 days a year, it is required to obtain a Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination Systems Permit (WPDES) and required to follow strict guidelines and renew the permit every five years. If these environmental regulations are broken, the penalty can result in fines amounting in hundreds of thousands of dollars, a loss of their operation permit, a referral to the Department of Justice, and even jail time.

While the DNR requires large permitted dairy operations to comply with a ZERO discharge regulation as a mandatory cost of doing business, many other state

dischargers are not required to have a permit or not required to follow any discharge rules at all.

The DNR doesn't need more money to target the nearly 300 larger farms who are permitted zero dischargers, when municipalities are allowed to dump tens of millions of gallons of sewage at will. In addition, there are approximately 8,000 dairy farms with fewer than 1,000 animal units who are only mandated to comply with pollution regulations if tax payer dollars are given to them. We must stop scapegoating CAFOs and address all sources of pollution within our watersheds. It's time for everyone to rightfully share in the responsibility and get to work on real solutions.

Both small farms and big farms are critical components of the industry's well-being. Wisconsin's dairy farms of all types and sizes make up a substantial part of our state's economy with 11.9% of the state's employment — leading to an additional 1.46 jobs supported elsewhere. The closing of farms has less to do with the expansion of permitted dairy farms, but instead has much to do with world markets, our country's current trade situation with Mexico, Canada and China, and consumers purchasing alternative products to cow's milk.

The WDA does not want to lessen strict environmental standards already set in place for permitted dairy operations. Instead, WDA wants ALL dischargers to work towards uniform standards of zero discharge. An all-encompassing approach to environmental management — with no free passes — is what will allow for the strongest environmental standards possible.