

Wisconsin Dairy Alliance: WDA president challenges idea that high nitrate levels in the state are caused by CAFO operations

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Yesterday, WDA President Cindy Leitner had the opportunity to testify before the Vos Water Quality Taskforce. The Vos Water Quality Taskforce is considering new regulations to protect water quality in Wisconsin and Leitner called on them to take a leadership role in forming the future for water in Wisconsin.

During her presentation to the taskforce, Leitner used [maps](#) that lay out the location of CAFOs in Wisconsin and the estimated percentage of private wells that are over the nitrate standard by county to irrefutably disprove that high nitrate levels in wells should be solely blamed on CAFOs.

If CAFOs alone were to blame, the [maps](#) would reflect that the counties with the highest percentage of wells over the nitrate standards would have the most CAFOs, but they don't!

In a [list](#) of the top 10 counties that have CAFOs in them that Leitner shared, all of the percentage of wells exceeding the nitrate level are under 7.1% except for Dane county, which is at 18.2%. All of these counties have 10 or more CAFOs, some have over 20.

Taking it a step further, Leitner shared a [list](#) of the top 20 counties that have the highest percentage of wells over 10 ppm. Based on this list, there are only 4 counties, including Dane county that have more than 5 CAFOs and ALL of these counties have over 10.4% of their wells over the nitrate level. A quick glance at this table and you might have missed that Iowa county has 12.5% of their wells over the nitrate level and yet they have ZERO CAFOs in that county.

Are CAFOs still the problem?

The truth of the matter is that pollution comes from all sources including unregulated small farms, crop farmers that use chemical fertilizer, home owners that use lawn fertilizer, golf courses, rural residents with substandard septic systems and outdated wells and even our government municipalities who “control release”.

The WDA firmly stands by their belief that we need to have all potential dischargers on a path to zero-discharge; the same requirement that CAFO’s are already held to. While we know that this won’t happen overnight, we believe it is time that a scientific discussion is had with all dischargers. With trust, collaboration and innovation, we believe significant and viable solutions are attainable.

We can’t continue adding more regulations to the already regulated operations and expect water quality improvements.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read WDA President Cindy Leitner’s full testimony.