

# Wisconsin Dairy Alliance: Wisconsin's dairymen ask researcher to show his math

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CHILTON, WIS. – Science matters, today more than ever.

As researchers, lawmakers, advocates and farm neighbors take part in Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers' self-declared "Year of Clean Drinking Water," the need for objective data on environmental and agricultural issues is fundamental.

The importance of verifiable information is why educators ask students — from elementary school through doctoral studies — to "show their math."

The vast majority of Americans understand the notion of "spurious correlations," the realization that just because two cherrypicked sets of numbers match up doesn't imply a cause and effect.

Dairymen and others in the agricultural field have offered only a measured response to a recently released, much-hyped media report about an environmental study conducted by U.S. Department of Agriculture microbiologist Mark Borchardt. The press coverage has focused almost exclusively on creating a connection between agriculture, on one hand, and nitrates and coliform in water in Kewaunee County, Wis., on the other.

That's because Borchardt has only released a portion of his findings, choosing to withhold the complete study — including disclosure of its methodology, overall findings and verification methods — as he shops the research around for maximum

political impact.

Let's be clear: Borchardt's research might be valuable. It might offer new insights on critical issues of environmental importance.

But until the entirety of his research — with all its strengths and flaws — is available for review, to engage in a debate based on a headline-grabbing sliver of information would be speculative at best and irresponsible at worst.

Here's an example of why transparency is important: In speaking to the press, Borchardt seems to suggest that the proximity of a well to a manure storage pit directly impacts the risk of coliform contamination. However, Permitted dairy operations with 25 or more employees are required to have their wells tested quarterly and annually by a third party certifying their wells are safe for human consumption.

One could easily draw the correlation that those who dwell and work closest to manure storage — the farmers — would have tainted wells. The testing proves otherwise.

The Wisconsin Dairy Alliance very much appreciates anytime new research data regarding water quality is announced. However, we are also interested in obtaining all the data that supports the conclusions presented in recent press coverage.

We urge the media and others to be cautious before drawing scientific conclusions, especially when the actual research hasn't been released to the public. We believe that Professor Borchardt has the moral and professional responsibility to stop making public statements and hosting PR presentations until he releases his data — all his data.

We believe in science. It's time to stop scapegoating and bring everyone to the table to have a serious discussion. WDA believes all dischargers want to be part of the solutions, but publicity ploys and speaking tours that are designed to do little more than sway lawmakers undercut the trust and collaboration required to reach significant solutions.

It's time for Dr. Borchardt to show his math.