

Midwest Environmental Advocates: Public testimony reveals overwhelming support for permit changes that require Portage County CAFO to test groundwater for manure contamination

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MADISON, WI— Today, at a public hearing held by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), members of the public expressed overwhelming support for a proposal to modify a wastewater discharge permit for Gordondale Farms, a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) in Portage County. The [draft permit](#) includes conditions that require the farm to monitor groundwater quality in areas where large amounts of manure are spread.

Close to 50 people attended today's hearing. Those who testified at the hearing voiced support for the proposed permit modifications by a 10-to-1 margin.

If DNR's proposed modifications are incorporated into the final version, it will be the third CAFO permit to incorporate conditions and authority outlined in a [state Supreme Court ruling](#) last summer. That decision affirmed the DNR's authority to use commonsense permit conditions such as groundwater monitoring and limits on herd size to protect water quality.

Gordondale houses approximately 2,500 dairy cows and is located near the town of Nelsonville. The original permit was challenged in September 2020 by Clean Wisconsin and a group of local residents represented by Midwest Environmental

Advocates (MEA). The petitioners challenged the permit because its terms did not do enough to protect local drinking water.

According to the terms of Gordondale's draft permit, the farm will be required to monitor groundwater on fields upgradient of Nelsonville. This modification is necessary because the recharge zone for the groundwater that Nelsonville residents drink includes fields on which the farm spreads its manure.

In 2018, the Portage County Health Department tested private drinking water wells in Nelsonville and found that [almost half were contaminated with high levels of nitrates](#). Nitrate is the most widespread contaminant in Wisconsin, and approximately 90 percent of nitrate in groundwater can be traced back to agriculture. The ongoing water quality crisis has led local residents to call for increased accountability and oversight of large livestock operations like Gordondale Farms.

"It's been four years since Nelsonville residents began pleading with the DNR to require transparency and accountability from Gordondale Farms. Meanwhile, half of Nelsonville's residential wells continue to exceed safe drinking water standards for nitrates, and people continue to get sick. It's past time for state officials to prioritize health over profits," said **MEA client and Nelsonville resident Lisa Anderson**.

Local resident Marianne Walker said at the hearing, "The Wisconsin Supreme Court made a ruling that the DNR has the authority to impose regulations that protect water. It is your legal and moral mandate to protect our water. I expect you to do your job."

"Today's hearing shows how much public support exists for strong permits that protect water quality. Like others in the community, our clients are asking the DNR to demonstrate its commitment to protecting natural resources and the health of Wisconsin residents by requiring Gordondale Farms to ensure that they are not contaminating the community's water," said **MEA Staff Attorney Adam Voskuil**.

Wisconsin law requires the DNR to consider both oral testimony and written comments before issuing the final permit. Those who support strong permit conditions that protect local drinking water are encouraged to send written comments no later than May 19. Comments can be emailed to Tyler.Dix@wisconsin.gov or mailed to 101 S Webster St PO Box 7921, Madison, WI, 53703.