

March 21, 2008

Senator Patty Birkholz  
PO Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Senator Birkholz:

I am writing this letter to ask for your assistance in stopping the approval of the proposed 9,000 hog farm at the site of the former Monies Mushroom factory on 62nd in Fennville, MI. The application was made on Mike Geerling for Hillside Farms in Ganges Township.

I come from a family of farmers - my grand parents and great grand parent spent their lives farming corn and dairy cows on the Prairie Rhonde in Schoolcraft, MI. My uncle and cousins are blueberry farmers. I understand the Right to Farm Act. What I do not understand is – **what about the rights of nearby homeowners and taxpayers like myself?** I believe in family, work and social responsibility and I imagine that this farmers believes in the same values too. However, I ALSO believe that we must *come to a compromise regarding the rights of farmers and the rights of the nearby homeowners as well....*

My husband and I moved from downtown Kalamazoo to Allegan County in 2001 specifically seeking the amenities that the country life offers. This includes the quiet, cleaner air, a place to organically grow our own food, - in short a place to find fewer pollutants, heavy metals, and in short a quality of life that was unavailable in the city. We care deeply about sustainable agriculture, food without e-coli contaminants and eating whole, organic safe food that comes from the local family farm.

I personally believe that we are the stewards of the earth and I have huge concerns when the earth is treated as if it is a disposable commodity, being used and abuse, because to me, the grand daughter of farmers – *it should not be treated in this manner.* We must act responsibly putting back into the land more than we take out while protecting nearby waterways, home and food sources.

I have a number of specific concerns about a 9,000 hog, "Factory Farm" being approved in an area that sits near the Black River watershed. Not only does my concerns include the effect on the air quality we breath, I am greatly concerned about the effect of yet another factory farm on the groundwater. (Their is a cattle farm directly across the street owned by the same family.)

I am certain that you are aware that we have many blueberry growers in our area, a majority of whom irrigate their crops from the Black River and its surrounding watershed. Are we as a community and a nation willing to risk e-coli in the fruit that has that has helped to make the "fruit belt" of Michigan a well known and productive producer?

My research has shown me that typically large amounts of waste products from these farm are stored in a lagoon. What happens if we get a large amount of rain or snow melt and these lagoons overflow? Once our ground water is contaminated all of us her in the rural area who drink from our well and irrigate our vegetable gardens are in great peril.

In addition to the concerns outlined above, I am personally very concerned about the changes in our quality of life should such a farm be approved.

From conversations with local realtor's, I am certain that our homes value would drop. After all, would you choose to purchase a house that is within smelling distance of a 9,000 hog farm?

I have been told that for every factory farm allowed, a number of smaller family farms goes out of business. And together the jobs brought in for the new project equal lower number of jobs that those on the original smaller farms.

To be bluntly honest with you, my husband and I do not want a Factory Farm with 9,000 hogs near our home.

This facility was not here when we took our life savings and invested in 5 acres, our home and built the White Oak Studio and Gallery and the White Oak Blacksmith Shop here. My customers would not appreciate coming to the "Art Coast of Michigan" if the hog farm negatively impacted the quality of their visit here.

Groups such as the Blue Coast Artists with their artist studios provide a significant economic impact to this area with their May through December tourist season, highlighted by the annual Fall Tour of Studios each fall. Do you think that the thousands of tourist who enjoy this two day event will continue coming to our area, taking rooms in bed and breakfasts and hotels eating in our restaurants if the water or air quality here is effected?

I read on your website that you were the chair of the recent bill to preserve groundwater in Michigan. **Please help us preserve our ground water in Allegan County as well as the sanctity of our rural landscape, and please help to influence the Department of Agriculture to vote no and to not approve this pending facility.**

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Donna & Gene Allgaier-Lamberti  
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