

## In Washington County, a Traditional Hog Farmer Thrives



Aaron Sobaski's sows run to greet him as he approaches their pen. He crosses Large Black and Hereford females with Berkshire boars and allows them to breed naturally, not with artificial Insemination.

All Photos: Diane Rosenberg

By Diane Rosenberg  
President and Executive Director

Aaron Sobaski's hogs are quite content. His 100 sows and a couple thousand finishing hogs enjoy a life that is natural and comfortable, with ongoing access to the outdoors from open barns and hoop houses lined with deeply bedded straw. You don't hear stressful squeals, but they will enthusiastically grunt a friendly greeting when you stop to say hello and scratch their heads.

Sobaski is an anomaly in Washington County where CAFOs abound, packed with at least 1.3 million hogs as of the 2017 USDA agricultural census. You can see several confinement buildings from

his farm and there 40,000 hogs within two miles of his home.

"Probably all the fields in Washington County get CAFO manure except about 4,000 acres," he says. "When they spread manure, you just have to keep your windows closed."

But that wasn't my experience on this farm, where I stood just feet from a manure pile, a valuable source of composted fertilizer. There was barely an odor – I didn't even notice the mound behind me until Sobaski pointed it out. It was just a typical barnyard scent, not the nauseating stench I've experienced near a CAFO.

Sobaski raises hogs the way all Iowans

**FARM** continued on p. 8

### In the News.....

## Iowa CCI and Food & Water Watch Bring Lawsuit Against the State

A Polk County District judge ruled in September that a lawsuit brought against the state by Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement and Food & Water Watch may move forward reports Food & Water Watch (September 12, 2019). The groups allege the state is violating the rights of Iowa citizens by failing in its obligation to protect the Raccoon River for drinking and recreational use.

The lawsuit bases its argument on the Public Trust Doctrine, a legal principle under which a government owns and is entrusted with managing designated natural and cultural resources for the public's

**LAWSUIT** continued on p. 7

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**LANCE PRICE, Ph.D. – Factory Farms Are Creating Superbugs**

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# JFAN NEWSLETTER

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## President and Executive Director

Diane Rosenberg

## Editor-in-Chief and Art Director

Diane Rosenberg

## Contributing Writers

Dr. John Ikerd

Darcy Comey

## Distribution

Chihlan Chiu

## Legal Counsel

David E. Sykes

Fairfield, Iowa

## Accounting

Fairfield Accounting Services, Fairfield  
Brooks, Lodden, P.C., Des Moines, Iowa

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JFAN

P.O. Box 811 • Fairfield, IA 52556

(641) 209-6600

www.jfaniowa.org • jfan@lisco.com

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## In the News.....

# EWG Study: Tap Water with Nitrates May Cause 12,000 Cancer Cases Annually

Scientists at the Environmental Working Group (EWG) found nitrate pollution in US tap water may be causing an estimated 12,500 cases of cancer each year. The first-of-its-kind peer-reviewed study was published in *Environmental Research* reports EWG (June 11, 2019)

Four states – including Iowa – were at the high end of EWG estimates, with more than 10 cancer cases per 100,000 people annually.

The scientists looked at exposure scenarios in seven US and international studies and identified five types of cancer associated with various levels of nitrate in drinking water.

In some cases, increased risk was found at nitrate contamination levels **10 times lower** than the current EPA limit of 10 parts per million (ppm). The current standard was originally developed in 1962 to protect against Blue Baby Syndrome.

Colorectal cancer made up 80% of the cases with ovarian, thyroid, kidney, and bladder cancers making up the rest.

Colorectal cancer risk factors include obesity, smoking, physical inactivity, and consumption of red and processed meat, but a 2018 Danish study found a significant risk at nitrate levels greater than 0.9 ppm, and a Spanish study found increased risk at approximately 1.7 ppm. A long-term research program in Iowa also finds an increased risk of colorectal, ovarian, thyroid and bladder cancers from drinking water containing nitrate.

EWG's scientists conducted a meta-analysis that combined the findings of eight earlier studies and found a statistically significant nitrate/colorectal cancer relationship. Based on their research, they estimate nitrate levels to protect against colorectal and other cancers to be 0.14 ppm, a 70% decrease than the EPA's current limit.

The analysis was based on water contamination levels in years 2010-2017 reported to the federal Safe Drinking Water Information System by public water systems. The 43 million Americans that rely on private wells may be at greater risk for nitrate pollution. Agricultural states had the highest levels of nitrate pollution from the use of commercial fertilizers and manure. *(See story on page 14.)*

Studies have shown that nitrate contamination is also associated with low birth weight, premature birth, and neural tube defects.

In 2017, the EPA began reviewing health impacts from drinking water in their Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) program after studies emerged on nitrates and health, but in April IRIS suspended the review, removing it as a priority for 2019.

To protect against nitrate pollution, EWG says reverse osmosis systems can remove nitrates, but not ordinary carbon filters. They recommend learning your public water system's levels through the annual Consumer Confidence Report. Private wells should be tested regularly. Anyone with nitrate levels close to or exceeding 10 ppm should switch to another water source or install a nitrate removal system, they say.



Photo: Gemenacom/Shutterstock.com

*EWG developed an interactive map in association with their study. To see the Estimated Nitrate Attributable Cancer Cases for Each State visit:*

[www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019\\_nitrate/map/](http://www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019_nitrate/map/)

# Global Antimicrobial Resistance Increasing in Livestock

A new international study reveals that farm animals in developing countries are developing antimicrobial resistance at a quick pace, reports *Modern Farmer* (September 22, 2019). In some cases, antimicrobial resistance is as high as 60% according to the study published in *Science*.

Scientists reviewed data from over 900 surveys over an 18-year period and found resistance nearly tripled in hogs and poultry and doubled in cattle. The groundbreaking study was conducted by an international group of researchers representing universities and nonprofits.

Researchers found hotspots of resistance in countries in Asia, Africa, and South and Central America. They linked the increase to a transition to high protein diets in low- and middle-income countries combined with global expansion of industrial livestock production dependent on antimicrobials for animal health. Globally, 73% of the world's antimicrobials are used in animal agriculture, they wrote.

Resistance ranged from 20-60% for ciprofloxacin and erythromycin to 10-40%



Photo: Shutterstock.com

for third and fourth generation cephalosporin. These medically important antibiotics treat a wide range of human infections including respiratory infections, urinary tract infections, and sexually transmitted diseases.

"The portfolio of antimicrobials used to raise animals for food is rapidly getting depleted with important consequences for animal health, farmers' livelihoods, and potentially for human health," wrote the study's authors.

"Regions affected by the highest levels of AMR should take immediate actions to preserve the efficacy of antimicrobials

that are essential in human medicine by restricting their use in animal production," they said. "However, in regions where resistance is starting to emerge, there is a window of opportunity to limit the rise of resistance by encouraging a transition to sustainable animal farming practices."

Read the full study here: [bit.ly/33hmk19](http://bit.ly/33hmk19)

## From the World Health Organization:

### What is the difference between antibiotic and antimicrobial resistance?

Antibiotics are medicines used to prevent and treat bacterial infections. Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change in response to the use of these medicines. Bacteria, not humans, become antibiotic resistant. These bacteria may then infect humans and are harder to treat than non-resistant bacteria. Antimicrobial resistance is a broader term, encompassing resistance to drugs to treat infections caused by other microbes as well, such as parasites (e.g. malaria), viruses (e.g. HIV) and fungi (e.g. Candida)



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# UN: Urgent Action Needed to Avert Antimicrobial Resistance Crisis

by World Health Organization

NEW YORK – UN, international agencies and experts released a groundbreaking report in April demanding immediate, coordinated and ambitious action to avert a potentially disastrous drug-resistance crisis.

If no action is taken - warns the UN Ad hoc Interagency Coordinating Group on Antimicrobial Resistance who released the report – drug-resistant diseases could cause 10 million deaths each year by 2050 and damage to the economy as catastrophic as the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. By 2030, antimicrobial resistance could force up to 24 million people into extreme poverty.

Currently, at least 700,000 people die each year due to drug-resistant diseases, including 230,000 people who die from multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. More and more common diseases, including respiratory tract infections, sexually transmitted infections and urinary tract infections, are untreatable; lifesaving medical procedures are becoming much riskier, and our food systems are increasingly precarious.

Recognizing that human, animal, food



Photo: Aleksandar Malivuk/Shutterstock.com

and environmental health are closely interconnected, the report calls for a coordinated, multisectoral “One Health” approach. It recommends countries:

- Prioritize national action plans to scale-up financing and capacity-building efforts;
- Put in place stronger regulatory systems and support awareness programs for responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials by professionals in human,

- animal and plant health;
- Invest in ambitious research and development for new technologies to combat antimicrobial resistance;
- **Urgently phase out the use of critically important antimicrobials as growth promoters in agriculture.** (emphasis ours)

This report reflects a renewed commitment to collaborative action at the global level by the World Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

“The report’s recommendations recognize that antimicrobials are critical to safeguard food production, safety and trade, as well as human and animal health, and it clearly promotes responsible use across sectors,” said José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). “Countries can foster sustainable food systems and farming practices that reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance by working together to promote viable alternatives to antimicrobial use, as laid out in the report’s recommendations.”



Factory farms are responsible for polluting local waterways and groundwater resources, fouling the air and treating workers and animals inhumanely - all while undermining the economic viability of family farmers and ranchers, and ruining the quality of life for rural residents.



SRAP works throughout the US helping communities protect themselves from the impacts of factory farms by empowering family farmers, ranchers and rural citizens with the tools, information and expertise to become powerful advocates for their communities.

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# Can the Corporate Takeover of Dairy Farms Be Stopped?

by Dr. John Ikerd  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Missouri at Columbia

We are now seeing a corporate takeover of dairy production, which is the last bastion of full-time, independent family farms in animal agriculture.

In an April 2018 blog post, Farm Aid noted that, since 1970, the number of American dairy farmers has dropped by more than 93%, from more than 640,000 to about 40,000 today.

The post goes on: "In an industry dominated by corporate interests, family farms are constantly at risk of going under. A consistent, severe slump in milk prices in recent years has pushed many dairy farm businesses beyond the point of survival. In the last year, there's been a 3% drop in the number of dairy farms, with the future of those remaining increasingly uncertain."

There has been little cause for hope over the year since this Farm Aid blog post and little hope for a significant improvement in prices for at least a year in the future. Considering this stark situation, independent dairy farmers would do well to review how the corporate takeover



Photo: USDA/Peggy Greb

of other sectors of animal agriculture has come about.

Poultry was the first to fall under corporate control, followed by beef, then pork, and now dairy. The corporatization of each sector has been a bit different, but all have followed the same basic pattern. We now see that pattern unfolding in dairy production.

I am more familiar with the corporate takeover of the pork industry than that of poultry or beef. It happened during the 1990s, while I was still an active faculty

member of the University of Missouri. Reluctantly, I became involved in the controversy surrounding corporate takeover of hog production. By then, the entire poultry industry was already vertically integrated, which means a few large corporations controlled all phases of production from breeding stock to retail-ready poultry products.

The production process for pork was longer than for poultry but short enough to allow corporate control of the entire process – from breeding stock to finished product. Vertical integration of the pork industry had been limited by persistent disease problems in the larger confinement hog feeding operations. However, when routine feeding of antibiotics became a common practice, a major obstacle to a corporate takeover of pork production was removed. The remaining corporate challenge was to displace independent hog farmers, many of whom were very efficient producers.

During the 1990s, the University of Mis-

**TAKEOVER** *continued on p. 15*

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# Investors Changing the Food Industry?

*A powerful investor group may have some sway*

A consortium of over 80 investors with over \$16 Trillion in assets are using their financial might to pressure agricultural food companies to change practices that increase greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), pollute water, and threaten public health, all deemed an investment risk, reports *Forbes* (April 7, 2019).

FAIRR, launched in 2015 by Jeremy Collier, an influential private equities manager, has grown to one of the world's largest investor groups with a focus on changing industrial meat, dairy and egg production to reduce its harmful environmental impacts.

"Animal agriculture is the world's highest-emitting sector without a low-carbon plan," said FAIRR in a January 29, 2019 press release. More than 70% of meat and livestock index companies don't have GHG emission targets according to the Collier FAIRR Index.

"Fast-food giants deliver speedy meals, but they have been super slow in re-

sponding to their out-sized environmental footprints," said Collier. "Investors are eager to see more leadership from these



Photo: Everything Possible/Shutterstock

companies to reduce the mounting climate and water risks linked to their meat and dairy suppliers."

"When it comes to evaluating market risk, rising global temperatures and intensifying competition for water access are in-

creasingly material factors for investors. This is especially the case in the meat and dairy sector. From field to fork, investors want to understand which food companies are monitoring and minimizing the long-term environmental risks in their supply chain. This engagement sends a clear message to the fast food sector that investors expect them to deliver sustainable supply chains," said Heike Cosse, Engagement Manager at Aegon Asset Management and a member of FAIRR.

In January FAIRR sent letters to six of the largest fast food chains that manage over 120,000 eating establishments worldwide including McDonalds, Domino's Pizza, Burger King, Chipotle, Wendy's, and KFC to urge them to develop goals for cutting greenhouse gas

emissions from their industrial meat supply chains.

The letter called for the following according to the release:

- Adopt a supplier policy with clear requirements for suppliers of animal pro-

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tein products to report and reduce GHG emissions and freshwater impacts.

- Publish quantitative, time-bound targets to reduce the GHG emissions and freshwater impacts of their own meat and dairy supply chains.
- Commit to publicly disclose progress on these targets annually.
- Undertake a climate scenario analysis in line with the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures.

FAIRR also focuses on antibiotic use in factory farms, identifying it as an investment risk in the food, pharmaceutical, healthcare, and insurance industries. A 2016 United Kingdom report predicted drug resistance would cost \$100 trillion by 2050. The FAIRR Protein Producer Index found 77% of companies listed are “high risk” on antibiotic management.

FAIRR looks to be having some impact. A three-year shareholder engagement with 25 giant food retailers and manufacturers has found that some leaders are beginning to capitalize on the rising demand for alternative proteins, while others are falling behind the curve of a booming growth industry according to their July 24, 2019 press release. This year, Burger King and White Castle intro-

duced the Impossible Burger and plant based options are becoming more common in other food chains.

A September FAIRR investor network analysis of 60 of the largest global meat, fish, and dairy producers reveals the industry still has a long way to go. On the positive side, plant-based investments are booming: 25% of animal protein producers (15 of 60 firms) now have some investments in alternative proteins such as ‘plant-based meats’. This includes traditional meat companies such as JBS, Tyson and Marfrig.

**LAWSUIT** *continued from p. 1*

use. With water pollution well documented and only voluntary agricultural pollution controls in place, the lawsuit argues the state is failing in its duty to protect the Raccoon River from factory farm pollution.

The plaintiffs seek mandatory nitrogen and phosphorus limits for the watershed, a viable, actionable plan to clean up the Raccoon River and a factory farm moratorium in the watershed until the river is restored.

In September, the lawsuit faced its first hurdle when the state of Iowa argued for the case to be dismissed because the

plaintiffs did not have legal “standing.” Judge Robert Hanson rejected the state’s arguments that the plaintiffs did not meet their burden to show how they were injured by water pollution, that the plaintiffs were seeking relief the court could not grant without infringing on the Iowa legislature’s authority, and that plaintiffs should have pursued river restoration piecemeal through state agency actions, rather than holistically through the court, according to a Public Justice press release.

“This order is a serious win for Iowans,” said Emma Schmit of Food and Water Watch. “Judge Hanson’s rejection of Iowa’s motion to dismiss will prevent the state from continuing to sweep its water pollution problems under the rug. After years of our legislature failing to act, it’s exciting to see our courts take up the issue of Iowa’s polluted water.”

The groups are represented by Public Justice, Food & Water Watch, Roxanne Conlin & Associates, and Channing Dutton, of Lawyer, Lawyer, Dutton & Drake LLP.

“This is cause for celebration,” said Roxanne Conlin, co-counsel in the case. “The court has agreed to hear whether or not the waterways of Iowa should be protected for public use. We’re anxious to move forward.”

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## FARM *continued from p. 1*

raised them when he was growing up during the 1980's. "There weren't any of these CAFOs around then," he said. "Every farm had 50-100 sows, and everyone had hogs on pasture and outside. That's just the way it was." But that's not the way it stayed.

After college, Sobaski worked on a cattle ranch in Oklahoma for "three or four years" returning to Iowa where he struggled to find work. As a last resort, he took a job in a CAFO with 3000 sows.

"I wasn't happy. I was sick all the time, like every couple of months. I had pneumonia, it was always something," he said. After his third child was born in 2011, Sobaski was ready to do something different.

"I came home one day and told my wife I'm going to quit my job to put sows outside – I'm going to raise pigs the way I used to," Sobaski muses. "She told me I was crazy, the bank told me I was crazy, everyone told me I was crazy. But I did it anyway. I got it done."

It wasn't easy for Sobaski to borrow money to start his farm, though. "The day I walked into the bank and asked for \$50,000 to start my project, their initial answer was 'No.' But in the same breath, they would have loaned me \$650,000 to build a CAFO, no questions asked," he said. Banks consider a contract with a livestock corporation as guaranteed income for at least 10 years, and the confinement building serves as collateral. "I said I didn't want to do it that way," he adds.

Sobaski wound up coming up with the funding on his own, but he had to scale back his venture to start with 20 sows in 2012,

not the 50 as he originally planned. But within two years, his success record convinced the banks to get on board, allowing him to expand. Now his 100 sows provide two litters of 10-12 piglets each year, a total of approximately 2000 finishing hogs.

Sobaski has grown large enough now to be spread over six farm sites and work full time raising hogs.

Approximately 80% of Sobaski's hogs are sold to Niman Ranch, whose primarily domestic market offers stable, high-end pricing per hog. He also has his own label, Pure Pork, that he sells to a growing market, which includes New Pioneer's three stores in Iowa City, Coralville, and Cedar Rapids. He sends the cooperatives a total of three pigs each week, and the fresh pork flies off the shelves. "We're their signature pork producer," he says proudly.

Sobaski also sells his pork to New York markets that are especially interested in younger, smaller hogs for roasting. Sobaski's five-year goal is to flip his distribution percentage and sell 80% of the hogs through Pure Pork.

While Sobaski is not an organic producer, he raises his hogs without antibiotics and drugs, and six months ago he officially went completely non-GMO, purchasing feed from his father. Niman doesn't have an organic standard, he says, and New Pioneer is fine with the natural, non-GMO product that he offers.

The hogs are humanely raised, and the farm has a Gap 3 certification. "I'm at the top of the scale for Niman without turning the hogs into my timber," he says. "I take as good care of my



Sobaski holds a tiny piglet in a pen where it was born a week earlier.

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One of the open barns with deeply bedded straw that allow Sobaski's hogs to freely move around outdoors.

hogs as I do my children."

Sobaski is the first to admit raising hogs the way he does is labor intensive, not like managing a confinement. "I have a bunch of buddies that manage CAFOs for other people, and they tell me the hardest part of their job is dragging out dead pigs," he says. "In a CAFO you walk into a building, push a button, and the pigs are fed. I feed most of my pigs with a 5-gallon bucket. I carry a lot of feed everyday."

For Sobaski, the most challenging part of farming is during the wet springs and cold winters when he has to ensure his pigs have enough dry bedding to keep them warm and he has to thaw out

their water. But it's a family affair, his five children ages 6-16 help around the farm, and his older sons are already talking about coming back to join Sobaski after college. "They all love it," he says.

When it's time for his sows to give birth, Sobaski transfers them into 7x10 foot pens where they have ample room to move. The pens are filled with plenty of straw so the mamas can make nests "like they are naturally supposed to. They farrow their babies comfortably. They're just happy without a care in the world," he says. That is in contrast to the use of farrowing crates in CAFOs, where, similar to gestation crates, the mothers can only stand up or lie down.

One thing Sobaski does have in common with the CAFO industry is a deep concern about the highly contagious and deadly African Swine Fever Virus (ASF) coming into Southeast Iowa. ASF is ravaging China's hog population, with reports of up to half of its herds being culled. There

is neither treatment nor vaccination for ASF; once a pig contracts the disease, the entire herd is destroyed. While entry into the United States is not inevitable, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig said Iowa is preparing to act aggressively to stop it in its tracks if it does.

It's one of the reasons why Sobaski won't allow his hogs to feed in his 10 acres of fenced-in timber, where an abundance of acorns can further enhance the pork's already delectable flavor. "Within two miles of my home there are 40,000 pigs," he says. He's con-

**FARM** continued on p. 13



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# Our Activities At a Glance

## JFAN Working Hard for You

by Diane Rosenberg  
President and Executive Director

### JFAN Holds Meetings on Air and Water Quality This Spring

JFAN presented two informational meetings this spring focusing on air and water quality issues.

**What's That Smell?**, held in March, arose after repeated queries about the stronger hog manure odor that many experienced during last year's fall and winter months. JFAN's Francis Thicke, Jocelyn Engman and Diane Rosenberg spoke on why the wet autumn led to increased CAFO smells\* and laid out just what one inhales when breathing in these noxious odors.

Attendees also learned about manure management plans, what constitutes a manure application violation, and how to report a potential violation to the Iowa DNR. The handout on reporting violations is now found on JFAN's website.

In April, Dr. Chris Jones, lead re-

searcher at the University of Iowa IIHR-Hydrosience and Engineering Lab, gave a fascinating presentation during **Our Water at Risk**. Jones first gained attention in Iowa for his research that made the definitive connection between the levels of commercial and animal fertilizer applied to fields and nitrates leaching into Iowa waterways. He spoke on his studies and how CAFOs are contributing to Iowa's poor water quality.

A particularly eye catching slide was a map Jones prepared of the amount of manure generated by CAFOs in Iowa's individual watersheds and their human waste equivalent as represented by various population centers around the world.

The meeting was recorded and can be viewed at [bit.ly/318aGjA](http://bit.ly/318aGjA)

Jones frequently posts informative articles on water quality on his blog available at [bit.ly/33hnpBW](http://bit.ly/33hnpBW)

*\* Last year's wet autumn made it difficult for manure applicators to get heavy equipment out into soggy fields. Many factory farms delayed spreading manure until the ground was*

frozen and or snow covered. The DNR then provided numerous exemptions from regulations prohibiting the application of manure on snow covered or frozen ground, and waste was also allowed to be spread on the surface rather than injected into the ground.

### Fewer New CAFOs in Jefferson County This Year

To date, only two new CAFOs were proposed in Jefferson County this year. However, we are keeping an eye out for two other factory farms that we understand may be proposed in the next few months.

**Buch Farms LLC–Dave's Place:** A 2480-head hog confinement was proposed in October by Brandon Buch to be constructed on 125th Street, west of Driftwood Avenue in Polk Township. JFAN alerted approximately 50 families within a two-mile radius of the confinement shortly before press time.

This new CAFO is sited about a mile north of two other 2480-head CAFOs also owned by Brandon Buch that are built side by side under different LLC names. Because of the LLC loophole, those two CAFOs are not regulated as one larger confinement.

Many of the same fields in the new CAFO's manure management plan (MMP)

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are also in the MMPs of Buch's two other CAFOs. JFAN intends to take a closer look at the MMPs to see if there is enough land capacity for Buch's new CAFO.

**John Pacha CAFO:** A 1200-head CAFO was proposed by John Pacha in northeast Walnut Township this spring. JFAN learned of the confinement from neighbors familiar with Pacha's plans who reached out for JFAN's support.

The CAFO is sited near a neighbor with a motorcross track who was concerned about odor impacting his business. JFAN met with the neighbor and provided informational guidance and also spoke with other concerned neighbors. JFAN also contacted the Iowa DNR to address questions about the CAFO's proximity to a well, but were informed the separation distance was adequate.

At JFAN's strong recommendation, a group of seven neighbors met with Pacha to discuss their concerns about the CAFO's impacts on their quality of life and health. While Pacha didn't retreat from building the CAFO, he did agree to use a pit additive to control the odor and sign a contract agreeing to that point. He will be contracting with Vittetoe, Inc. for his hogs.

CAFOs of this size are not required to file a manure management plan or construction design statement, and JFAN would not have known of its existence and able to alert neighbors had an observant neighbor not informed us.

Jefferson County community members are the eyes and ears of county residents. We encourage anyone that suspects a CAFO may be proposed for their neighborhood to contact JFAN at 641-209-6600.

## Right to Harm Screens Around Iowa



*Right to Harm*, a documentary that exposes how CAFOs may impact affected neighbors is now available for community screenings.

The film premiered in Iowa in May at the Iowa Historical Museum in Des Moines at an event organized by the Iowa Alliance for Responsible Agriculture (IARA). Over 150 people including legislators attended the screening, which was followed by a lively panel discussion with Francis Thicke, Dr. John Ikerd, and CAFO neighbors Joyce Otto and Nancy Adams, moderated by filmmaker Matt Wechsler.

JFAN screened the film the following month to another audience of about 150 with Wechsler also on the panel.

Dr. John Ikerd provides commentary about the CAFO industry throughout the film. Iowa is one of the five states featured, and the documentary includes an interview with JFAN President and Executive Director Diane Rosenberg and scenes of her advocacy work.

Several screenings have already taken place with others scheduled for the next

few months. The Iowa Sierra Club will sponsor 10 screenings throughout Iowa beginning in October. IARA is also planning to sponsor at least 10 screenings and developed a Speakers Bureau of available panel discussion participants.

- Communities may request screenings directly through the *Right to Harm* website at [RighttoHarm.film](http://RighttoHarm.film)
- IARA has a web page listing upcoming screenings which may be found at [cleaniowanow.org/right-to-harm-in-iowa/](http://cleaniowanow.org/right-to-harm-in-iowa/)
- IARA is also actively raising money to help communities with the cost of licensing fees through a GoFundMe page available at [bit.ly/33pSkMr](http://bit.ly/33pSkMr)
- To request financial support for a community screening or for information on the Speakers Bureau, contact IARA at [info@cleaniowanow.org](mailto:info@cleaniowanow.org).

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# News Briefs

## FROM IOWA, THE US AND BEYOND

### Nebraskans Fight Against Costco, Call for Moratorium

A coalition of Nebraska organizations is calling for a factory farm moratorium reports *The Fern* (September 10, 2019). The moratorium petition was sparked by the growing number of chicken CAFOs going up in the state to supply a new Costco chicken processing plant in Fremont, Nebraska. Until recently, the state has been largely spared from mass poultry production.

Costco announced the construction of the poultry processing plant in 2016 and contracted with Lincoln Premium Poultry, a poultry management company, to supply broilers. At the beginning stages, Lincoln Premium announced it would work with 100-125 local contract growers. Broilers would be raised in four-barn operations each holding tens of thousands of chickens. From the onset, many residents raised concerns about water, air, and noise pollution.

The moratorium petition was announced after a news report disclosed

that 132 chicken houses in nine locations were “proposed by a single out-of-state operator”, a move that community members felt undermined Costco’s declared intention to bring jobs to Nebraska.

Governor Pete Ricketts decried the moratorium, calling its supporters “out-of-state environmental lobbying groups” and “anti-agriculture.” The coalition members are all Nebraska-based groups headed up by Nebraska residents and farmers.

“Costco and Lincoln Premium say this is ... about bringing the next generation back to the family farm...They are bringing degenerative farming to Nebraska, nothing else,” said Randy Ruppert of Nebraska Communities United in a press release.

### New Wisconsin Rules Aim to Curb Nitrates in Drinking Water

Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers announced plans to create new limits on farm runoff to protect drinking water from nitrate contamination reports *Madison Today* (August 1, 2019). New rules will be

drafted for soils in parts of the state where water is most at risk for nitrate pollution. The state has been struggling with drinking water contamination for many years.

New guidelines will be drafted on how



Photo: Tricky Shark/Shutterstock.com

farmers can apply fertilizer and manure, the main source of nitrate contamination, to fields. State agencies, academic researchers, and agriculture and conservation groups will develop the rules over a 30-month period.

Governor Evers declared 2019 the “Year of Clean Drinking Water” and proposed \$125 million to safeguard water quality. The legislature eliminated some of his proposals, but did allot \$48 million for water protection.



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Approximately 1.7 million Wisconsin residents source their drinking water from private wells, and 1 in 10 of those have hazardous nitrate levels, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. The state's Groundwater Coordinating Council says nitrate is the main contaminant of groundwater, and the problem is growing worse. In some parts of the state, half the wells are contaminated with nitrates.

The DNR began focusing on water quality in 2018 when it adopted new rules for animal feedlots in eastern Wisconsin where shallow bedrock, or karst, is predominant. Farmers in 16 counties now have greater restrictions for applying manure in an effort to reduce bacterial contamination in groundwater.

### Missouri Loses Local Control

Following in Iowa's footsteps, the Missouri State Legislature repealed local control of factory farms in May, prohibiting county commissions and health boards from having ordinances more stringent than state law reports *St. Louis Today* (May 14, 2019).

Backed by pro-industry groups such as Missouri Farm Bureau, the new law nullifies health ordinances that regulate CAFOs in approximately 20 counties.

Senate Democrats opposing the bill won some concessions after holding an

overnight filibuster. Additional setbacks were established for CAFOs that ship manure to other farms and a legislative committee will be formed to study the impacts of factory farms on Missouri's environment.

A coalition of counties, a neighborhood group, and several farmers are mounting a legal challenge to the law. They allege local governments have the power to pass regulations addressing county needs and concerns and that the Right to Farm Amendment, which narrowly passed in 2014, reinforces those rights. Further they claim local ordinances address emission standards and soil type, not addressed in state CAFO regulations.

A judge initially blocked the new law from taking effect while the lawsuit proceeds, but the injunction was subsequently overturned. The law is now in force as the lawsuit moves forward.

*Additional Sources: St. Louis Public Radio (September 16, 2019), KMZ-TV ABC Channel 17, The Missourian (August 7, 2019)*



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### FARM *continued from p. 9*

cerned about not only ASF but also any disease finding its way onto his farm.

"Driving down my road, you can see this is CAFO Central. The [trucks] drive by here, I don't care, some of my friends have CAFO buildings and I don't have anything against them. But if a hog poops out the side of a truck, and I drive through it and they have disease, I then have it. Or foggy mornings when the wind is just right can transfer [disease] through the air."

Nonetheless, Sobaski's hogs are healthier than pigs in confinements where the mortality rate is typically 6% or higher. On his farm, the mortality rate is more like 2-1/2%, mostly from the occasional piglet crushed by its unaware mother.

Most young farmers that want to raise hogs typically gravitate towards CAFOs, Sobaski says, because that's what they have grown up around, and the loans are so easy to get. But he has advice for those who are considering raising hogs.

"Pull up the Niman protocol and see if that's something that fits. You definitely have to be willing to work. But if you want a fulfilling way to raise hogs and be happy with what you do every day, go with Niman," he says.

Sobaski, for one, is glad he did.

## It's time for a factory farm moratorium in Iowa.

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# Iowa's Private Wells Overrun With Agricultural Contaminants

by the Iowa Environmental Council

Des Moines, IA -- Private wells across Iowa are contaminated with unsafe levels of two agricultural contaminants, according to an investigation by the Environmental Working Group and the Iowa Environmental Council.

The groups' analysis of state records from 2002 to 2017 found that thousands of private wells tested positive for coliform bacteria as well as nitrate, a chemical found in fertilizer and animal manure that is linked to cancer and birth defects. Both bacteria – including fecal coliforms like E. coli – and nitrate commonly enter waterways and groundwater in runoff from farms, and both contaminants are linked to severe human health problems.

"The state's own data show that agricultural pollution of drinking water in Iowa is worse than most people have previously thought," said Anne Schechinger, senior economic analyst at EWG and the study's primary author. "Wherever Iowans test for these contaminants, they have a pretty good chance of finding them."

An estimated 230,000 to 290,000 Iowans rely on private wells for their household drinking water. Yet over the 16 years examined in the study, only 55,000 wells in the state were tested for nitrate,

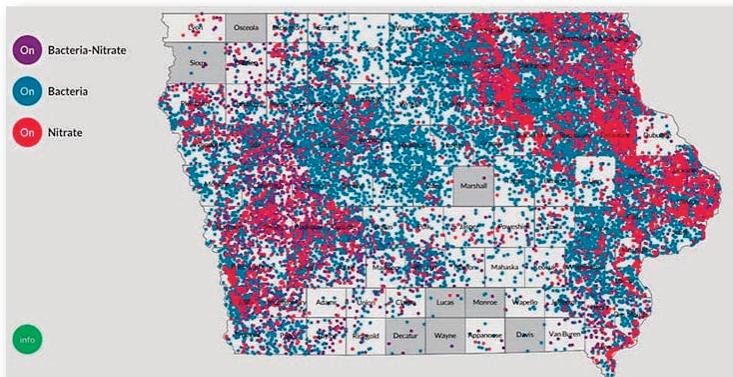
bacteria, or both.

Of those, more than 22,000 wells – more than 40 percent – tested positive for coliform bacteria at least once. Over 4,300 wells were positive for bacteria every time

per million, or ppm, and is based on science from the 1950s. (A part per million is equivalent to one milligram per liter, or mg/L.) More than 12,300 Iowa wells – 22 percent – had nitrate levels at or above 5 ppm, the threshold at which many more recent studies have found an increased risk of colon, bladder, ovarian, kidney and rectal cancer, as well as birth defects.

EWG's and IEC's analysis showed a steady growth in nitrate levels across the state: The average level of nitrate contamination in private wells nearly doubled between 2002 and 2017, from 3.1 ppm in 2003 to 5.7 ppm in 2013.

"There's a clear pattern of widespread private well contamination across Iowa that is growing worse for nitrate and staying steadily bad for bacteria," said Cindy Lane, water program director for the Iowa Environmental Council. "But we don't even have information on the thousands of wells



There are broad swaths of Iowa that have not had many wells tested. Visit [www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019\\_iowa\\_wells/map/](http://www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019_iowa_wells/map/) for the interactive map.

they were tested, showing ongoing contamination problems. The Environmental Protection Agency says there is no safe level of coliform bacteria in drinking water, because the bacteria indicate the presence of other harmful pathogens.

More than 6,600 wells, or 12 percent of those tested, had nitrate averages at or above the EPA's legal limit for drinking water systems. That standard is 10 parts

per million, or ppm, and is based on science from the 1950s. (A part per million is equivalent to one milligram per liter, or mg/L.) More than 12,300 Iowa wells – 22 percent – had nitrate levels at or above 5 ppm, the threshold at which many more recent studies have found an increased risk of colon, bladder, ovarian, kidney and rectal cancer, as well as birth defects.



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that were not tested during this period. That makes me worry that the problem is even more serious than documented.”

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources recommends that well owners test wells at least once a year but does not require it. Only 10 wells in the entire state were tested every year for nitrate, and only 12 wells were tested every year for bacteria. Almost two-thirds of all wells were tested only once between 2002 and 2017, even if that test showed unsafe levels of bacteria or nitrate.

The state requires newly dug or renovated wells to be tested for nitrate and coliform bacteria but does not require follow-up tests. Testing of already established wells is at the owners’ discretion. The state does provide funds for residents to test their wells voluntarily, but implementation varies widely among counties.

Some of the counties whose tests showed the highest concentration of nitrate and highest percentages of wells with bacteria present had the fewest tests of all, which shows that residents of areas with the biggest problems may be getting the least support.

The EPA, which sets and enforces federal drinking water standards for water utilities, does not regulate private well testing or treatment for the estimated 43 million Americans who rely on private wells for their drinking water.

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www.iaenvironment.org*

**TAKEOVER** *continued from p. 5*

Missouri operated a mail-in records program for Missouri farmers. Producers would mail copies of their purchases and sales records, which the university used to prepare financial statements that included their production costs and their profits. Each participant would be provided with summaries of financial results for similar producers so they could compare their performance with others – benchmarking.

We had enough records for farmers who specialized in hog production to provide farmers with average production costs for the most efficient and least efficient as well the average efficiency of hog producers in the program. We also had accurate information regarding costs of production in the large corporate affiliated feeding operations that were trying to gain a foothold in the state at the time.

The mail-in records indicated that the large corporate feeding operations would likely be more efficient than the least efficient one-third to one-half of existing Missouri hog producers. However, the corporate operations were likely to be less efficient than the most efficient one-third to one-half of existing hog producers.

In other words, any production-cost advantage enjoyed by the large corporate operations would be small compared to the production costs of the average Missouri hog producer. However, by being vertically integrated in pork processing and distribution as well as hog production, the large corporate operations were

ultimately able to drive even the most efficient independent hog producers out of business.

Under political pressure from the pork industry, Missouri’s anti-corporate farming law was changed to allow a large corporate pork operation to locate in north Missouri. During the mid-1990s, Premium Standard Farms built a large slaughter plant and feed mill and quickly acquired 80,000 sows expecting to produce more than 1.5 million slaughter hogs a year.

Similar large corporate operations had begun earlier in North Carolina and were expanding rapidly during times of profitable hog prices. Most of the corporate hogs in North Carolina were produced under comprehensive contracts that gave the corporation virtually complete control over production. It was obvious this rapid expansion in hog numbers eventually would depress hog prices to unprofitable levels for most existing producers.

The key to the corporate takeover was that they could easily outlast the least efficient one-third of independent producers during the inevitable depression in hog prices resulting from their expansion in production. But the corporate operations didn’t even need to be more efficient than the average independent producer. The corporations were involved in pork processing and slaughter as well as production. The packers lowered wholesale pork prices enough to allow the pork from hogs under their control to clear the market, but only enough to

**TAKEOVER** *continued on page 16*

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## TAKEOVER *continued from p. 15*

leave prices seriously depressed in markets where independent producers were forced to sell.

Any corporate losses on their owned or contract hogs were largely offset by wider margins of profit for hogs purchased from independent producers. Independent producers were not only forced to sell at large losses, some couldn't find markets at any price. During the late 1990s, market prices for hogs dropped to a low of \$8 per hundred pounds, while average costs of production were more than \$40 per hundred pounds.

Enough independent producers were eventually forced out of business to allow hog prices to return to more reasonable levels. However, as the less efficient producers were forced out of business, or became corporate contract producers to survive, an increasing share of total hog production came under corporate control. Eventually, even the most efficient independent producers couldn't survive these market conditions.

Even the vertically integrated corporations lost money at times during the takeover, and some were forced out of business as they competed for market share and control. The surviving corporations succeeded in taking over virtually

complete control of the hog industry – from hog genetics to finished pork products.

The takeover process for pork was similar in many respects to earlier experiences with poultry and beef. The least efficient independent producers are the first to be forced out of business by more efficient corporate producers. Once the corporations gain control of a significant share of the total market, they can begin to manipulate market prices available to remaining independent producers.

During times of surplus, the corporations limit reductions in wholesale prices in order to depress and hold market prices for independent producers to unprofitable levels long enough to force the survivors out of business. Obviously, agri-food corporations would not be able to manipulate prices or marketing margins in this way if markets were actually competitive. However, corporate antitrust laws have not been seriously enforced in the U.S. since the early 1900s.

Unfortunately, this is the harsh reality now confronting smaller independent dairy producers. The unbridled expansion of large confinement dairy operations has increased total production and depressed milk prices to unprofitable levels for most independent producers. Weaker consumer demand for dairy products has

magnified the depression. The least efficient independent producers have already been forced out of business by previous expansion in production and the large corporate dairy operations are continuing to expand. The remaining independent dairy farmers are now at risk.

The government has long been involved in pricing of milk, which makes the milk market somewhat different than that for other animal products. In addition, cooperatives are among the largest corporate processors of milk but are acting more like corporations than cooperatives.

It remains to be seen whether the large corporate dairy operations have gained sufficient market power to drive out the most efficient independent dairy producers. Regardless, the remaining independent dairy farmers can't afford to ignore the lessons learned from the corporatization of poultry, beef, and pork.

*Dr. John Ikerd was raised on a small dairy farm in southwest Missouri. He received his BS, MS, and Ph.D. degrees in agricultural economics from the University of Missouri. He enjoyed a 30-year academic career at four Land Grant Universities before retiring in 2000. He now spends most of his time writing and speaking on issues related to sustainability with an emphasis on economics and agriculture and is the author of several books.*

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