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Community Members Highlight Hazards of Factory Farms

MENOMONIE — Today residents, local officials and scientists gathered at the Menomonie City Library in Menomonie to highlight the environmental and public health impacts of Wisconsin's failure to adequately and fairly regulate large Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) or factory farms. [The Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter released white paper "CAFOs: A Threat to Water in Wisconsin"](#), which looks at the impact of factory farms across the state and calls for changes in Wisconsin's Livestock Facility Siting law. Northwest Wisconsin is facing a rapid expansion of existing and proposals for new facilities. Around the state these factory farms are responsible for contamination of groundwater, stress on water supply from over pumping, fish kills from manure spills, odor and many other hazards.

The seriousness of this problem was highlighted by the release of the latest information from studies done on contamination of wells in Kewaunee County. Tests have shown that up to 60 percent of sampled wells in a Kewaunee County contained fecal microbes, many of which are capable of making people and calves sick, including Cryptosporidium, a parasite that comes from both people and animals. [Researchers estimated Cryptosporidium in drinking water is likely infecting 140 of the county's 20,000 residents each year.](#)

"But the problem is not limited to Kewaunee County", said Neil Koch a retired hydrologist. "CAFOs in the Chippewa Valley will pollute the groundwater as well, he continued. "There are 150 septic waste land spreading sites in Dunn County that do not meet DNR standards for percolation rates which could cause health problems for people living near these sites."

These factory farms are not necessarily good for agriculture. "These large CAFOs, especially paired with the vertical integration that has been occurring in cases like Cranberry Creek and Grassland, are aggravating the processing capacity in our state and putting the squeeze on other farmers," said Rachel Kummer a local farmer.

"Since the passage of the Livestock Facility Siting law in 2004 we have seen a perfect storm of an explosion in the number of huge factory farms and a lack of enforcement. The result has been contaminated drinking water and manure spills causing fish kills," said Elizabeth Ward of the Sierra Club. "It is time we either repeal this law or amended to protect the people of Wisconsin and the state's environment, and until then there should be a moratorium on new or expanded facilities," concluded Ward.

This is the fifth in a series of six white papers released by the Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter. Previous papers have focused on water quantity, quality and lead contamination. The final report discusses energy infrastructure and water. All reports can be found online at sierraclub.org/Wisconsin.

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Founded in 1892 by John Muir, the Sierra Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club's mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters working to promote clean energy and protect water resources in Wisconsin.