



Dygert

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Whitley CAFO control essential

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Tim Dygert lives on Crooked Lake and is a board member of the Whitley Water Matters, LLC, which serves to “advocate for responsible management of the land, lakes, air and waterways in Whitley County, Indiana and neighboring communities through changes in local ordinances.”

Whether we like it or not, the meat industry has great power in this country and has decided that raising hogs, dairy cattle, beef cattle and poultry (turkeys, layers and broilers) in large factory-like environments called CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) is the most profitable to the meat industry. This trend is likely to continue.

CAFOs cause at least two well-documented problems in rural communities: pollution of waterways and lakes, and loss of residential property value.

In Indiana, the Office of the Indiana State Chemist controls where manure can be spread. Local communities have no ability to restrict beyond the minimal state regulations. The only

accommodation to the environment is that manure can't be applied closer than 50 feet from waterways and lakes. The penalties for violating these rules if caught are minimal – generally not more than \$250.

Under ideal conditions and strict adherence to the rules, this provides substantial protection to the waterways. The problem is that conditions are not always ideal and rules are not always followed.

If manure is applied a few hours before a 2-inch spring rain or if manure is applied not respecting the 50-foot setback, waterways will be negatively affected by both nutrients (mostly phosphorous) and pathogens including E. coli, campylobacter, cryptosporidium and others. The substantial increase in the number of impaired (polluted) waterways in Indiana and the nation tracks with the growth of the CAFO industry.

Since most of the massive amount of manure produced on a CAFO is spread on fields as close to the CAFO as possible, the pollution problem increases as the number of CAFOs increases. Therefore, reducing the amount of manure spread around sensitive environmental areas such as lakes and waterways requires siting CAFOs away from those areas.

Many studies confirm the negative effect of CAFOs on residential property values. The studies generally agree that the effect depends on the distance from the property, with most studies showing measurable effect out to 3 miles. One report states, "The most certain fact regarding CAFOs and property values is that the closer a property is to a CAFO, the more likely it will be that the value of the property will drop." Losses from a few percent at 3 miles to as much as 88 percent at a tenth of a mile are reported. Many studies show a loss of about 25 percent at one mile. Losses are higher when multiple CAFOs are present.

The only good news in all this is that Indiana still has home rule (local control) with regard to where CAFOs are allowed. Indiana state law allows municipalities in Whitley County to prevent CAFOs within a roughly 2-mile zone around their municipal limits. For the rest of the county, CAFOs can currently be built on any agricultural land regardless of proximity to dense residential or sensitive environmental areas. This does not make sense.

The Whitley County Plan Commission is responsible for drafting ordinances in the county. It's time for them to protect the property rights of all members of our community by establishing a 2-mile setback from communities with dense residential populations and from the shores of the major lakes in the county.

Right now there are only a few CAFOs in these areas. In 10 years, with the growth in this industry, there will be many unless the county acts to create some common-sense ordinances.