

**-- Annual Meeting 1998 Special Supplement --**  
**"A staggering amount of waste"**  
**from the Iowa Environment Quarterly (Fall 1998)**

On Saturday, September 12, the Iowa Environmental Council and the Soil and Water Conservation Society, Iowa Chapter, jointly held their annual meetings to explore several of Iowa's pressing environmental issues, including the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico, sprawl and farmland protection, and the spread of large-scale hog confinement operations. North Carolina, now the nation's second largest hog producer behind Iowa, has seen an enormous influx of these large swine operations -- and a number of serious hog manure spills that have damaged the state's waters. Last year, sweeping legislation was passed in North Carolina to address the problems, and one of the architects of that legislation, Cindy Watson, was the keynote speaker at the conference. Here are portions of her remarks.

Rep. Cindy Watson: When I sought election to the North Carolina House of Representatives, my first objective was to help establish a true two-party system in my county as well as in the entire state. We succeeded. My election helped secure a Republican majority in the North Carolina House. I was the first Republican and first woman, for that matter, to be elected from Duplin County for more than 100 years. "My campaign theme was 'I will help turn on the lights east of Interstate 95.' I-95 has long been unofficially recognized as the dividing line between the Piedmont and the agricultural Coastal Plain region. From plane or satellite, Eastern North Carolina was always dark at night when compared to the industrialized Piedmont. I thought that a good quality of life for the citizens of Eastern North Carolina would be in direct proportion to the amount of industry and city lights. "To accomplish my goal, I was determined to get regulation out of the marketplace, and give tax relief to corporations. With agricultural expansion leading the way, I was determined to be a champion for economic growth.

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"Imagine a city as big as New York suddenly grafted onto North Carolina's Coastal Plain. Double it. Now imagine that this city has no sewage treatment plants. All the wastes from 15 million people are simply flushed into open pits and sprayed onto fields. Turn those humans into hogs, and you don't have to imagine at all. It's already here."

-- from the Pulitzer Prize-winning series "Boss Hog: North Carolina's Pork Revolution,"  
Raleigh, North Carolina, News and Observer (Feb. 19, 1995)

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"Little did I realize that a meeting with a small group of concerned citizens known as the Alliance for a Responsible Swine Industry, would forever change my outlook. ARSI, just like the Iowa Environmental Council, is made up of citizens from all walks of life who simply want to have a good quality of life. . . .

"Through information provided to me by the people I represent and acquired through my on-site visits to homes, by touring sow nurseries, by wading through polluted streams and wetlands, by flying over damaged lagoons, visiting innovative waste treatment facilities, reading countless reports about the swine industry, and having hundreds of conversations with citizens who had been negatively impacted, I put together the pieces of a puzzle concerning the

expansion of the swine industry and its consequential environmental impact.

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"Because North Carolina ranks number 1 in turkey production, number 2 in swine production, and number 4 in broilers in the United States, there is a staggering amount of animal waste to dispose of. North Carolina's animal and poultry population is more than 100 million, and Duplin and Sampson counties in my district have almost half of these animals. On the generally accepted conversion of one to five (for every pound of human feces and urine generated, a hog generates five pounds), there is more hog feces and urine produced in Sampson and Duplin counties in North Carolina than all of the feces and urine produced by the total human population of the states of New York and California combined.

"Even though the industry uses state of the art methods for meat production, it is still using 'slop bucket' technology for waste treatment. To exacerbate the problem of quantity, this hog waste is put in open cesspools and sprayed on fields, many of which generate a horrible stench or cause an environmental hazard by leaking or collapsing and flooding rivers and streams. As regulatory records attest, sometimes the manure is intentionally diverted or straight-piped to flow into and destroy the waters of North Carolina.

"During the 1997 legislative session, I co-sponsored the swine regulatory bill that would ultimately be ratified. It was evident that North Carolina and particularly my district should not allow any more expansion from this industry if cesspools remained the basic waste treatment practice. That bill ultimately included a two-year moratorium on new or expanding hog operations. My decision for the moratorium was based on a study that clearly indicated that Duplin County's ground was saturated with all of the nitrogen that could be effectively used, yet the swine industry ignored this information and through lax regulation kept on building and spraying.

"The legislation also required that the Department of Agriculture seek alternative methods of swine waste disposal and phase out lagoons and spray fields. Several new technologies now are being tested. I believe a new technology should be in place before the moratorium is lifted.

"In addition, the legislation brought back local zoning, a responsibility that had been taken away from counties by a former legislator who, while in office, was successful in getting several laws passed that allowed the explosive growth of the swine industry in North Carolina. Zoning is a crucial tool necessary to control the orderly expansion of the swine industry.

"I empathize with our agricultural community as it endeavors to meet the challenges not only of the uncertainty of the marketplace but also the constant threat from nature. However, with less than 1 percent of our total population directly involved in the raising of crops, poultry, or animals, it is no wonder that agriculture no longer enjoys a general 'hands off' approach from governmental regulation. It is this 'hands off' mentality that allowed the dramatic uncontrolled expansion of the swine industry in North Carolina. . . .

"By taking advantage of special tax breaks and other incentives that were granted by the State of North Carolina to protect true family farms, some swine integrators disguised as family farms have enjoyed unbridled growth. Your legislators must establish criteria that effectively defines 'family farm.'

"Take a lesson from North Carolina and do not let this definition include billion-dollar industries. These mass food-producing industries must be bridled through common sense environmental protection legislation. . . ."

#### SIDE STORY:

Manure spills in Iowa and North Carolina: Unfortunate parallels

Perhaps it was a large hog manure spill into the headwaters of North Carolina's New River that prompted many North Carolinians to back the passage of the Clean Water Responsibility Act in 1997, a bill that Cindy Watson cosponsored. In that spill, a dike collapsed on a rain-soaked industrial swine facility, sending 25 million gallons of hog feces and urine across roads and crops and into the prized river.

Iowa also has an unfortunate history of manure spills. In the past four years, there have been more than 50 manure spills into Iowa rivers and streams serious enough for financial penalties. More than 1.1 million fish have been killed along with countless other aquatic species. Among the worst spills in Iowa -- to date -- have been:

A spill of more than 100,000 gallons of hog manure that flowed into Duck Creek in Allamakee County. This spill was especially disturbing because Duck Creek is one of the few places in Iowa where brown trout naturally reproduce (August 1998).

A spill of an unknown volume of hog manure from a lagoon in Howard County that ran into Crane Creek, killing an estimated 109,172 fish, including 302 American brook lamprey, a threatened species in Iowa (July 1997).

A spill of 100,000 gallons of hog manure deliberately pumped from a swine confinement pit into a waterway in Winnebago County that flowed into North Buffalo Creek, killing the most fish killed in a single spill so far: 586,753 (September 1996).