

Examples of Properties Devalued by Factory Farms

Studies & Reports

In describing the economic costs of CAFOs to rural communities, the recent Union of Concerned Scientists report stated that “because property values are reduced near CAFOs, the residential tax base may suffer as well.”

~ Doug Gurian-Sherman, Union of Concerned Scientists, *CAFOs Uncovered: The Untold Costs of Confined Animal Feeding Operations*, at 61 (April 2008).

The recent Pew Commission report on industrial farm animal production described the various negative impacts that factory farm facilities have on the environment, public health, animal welfare, and rural communities. The report did not directly address declining property values, but did note the negative influence factory farms have on rural social capital and the rights of neighbors to enjoy their own properties.

~ Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, *Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America*, at 40-49 (April 2008).

This report was prepared to assist local boards of health who have concerns about CAFOs in their communities and to help them “understand their role in developing ways to mitigate potential problems associated with CAFOs.” The report states that “[t]he most certain fact regarding CAFOs and property values are that the closer a property is to a CAFO, the more likely it will be that the value of the property will drop.” It also noted that “[d]eclines in property values can . . . cause property tax rates to drop, which can place stress on local government budgets.”

~ Carrie Hribar, National Association of Local Boards of Health, *Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities*, at III, 11 (2010).

A technical report for the Pew Commission report discussed various CAFO studies and found that: “Industrialization of animal agriculture leads to the reduced enjoyment of property and the deterioration of the surrounding landscape, which are reflected in declining home values and lowering of property tax assessments. Recurrent strong odors, the degradation of water bodies, and increased populations of flies are among the problems caused by CAFOs that make it intolerable for neighbors and their guests to participate in normal outdoor recreational activities or normal social activities in and around their homes.”

~ Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, *Community and Social Impacts of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations*, at 31.

In Iowa, one 1996 study found that proximity to a hog CAFO decreased neighboring property values in the following order: 40% within ½ mile; 30% within 1 mile; 20% within 1.5 miles, and; 10% within 2 miles.

~ William J. Weida, *The CAFO: Implications for Rural Economies in the U.S.* 1 (Colo. College & GRACE Factory Farm Project 2004) (citing Padgett & Johnson).

Another Iowa study found that there may be a 1-10% reduction in property values of residences upwind of new CAFO facilities, and that the drop in value “helps explain opposition by rural residents to large-scale feeding operations.”

~ Joseph A. Herriges et al., *Living with Hogs in Iowa: The Impact of Livestock Facilities on Rural Residential Property Values* 19-20 (Iowa State Univ. Ctr. for Agric. Dev. Working Paper 03-WP 342 (Aug. 2003)).

A 1999 study in Missouri found that the average loss of land value within three miles of a CAFO was \$112/acre.

~ Mubarak Hamed et al., *The Impacts of Animal Feeding Operations on Rural Land Values 2* (Cmty. Policy Analysis Ctr., Univ. of Mo., May 1999) (finding that “there is a relationship between proximity to a CAFO and the value of property”).

Studies cited by Dakota Rural Action found that property within a 3-mile radius of a CAFO loses 6.6% in property valuation, and property within 0.10 mile of a CAFO loses up to 88% in property valuation.

~ Dakota Rural Action, *CAFO Economic Impact* (June 2006) (citing North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (1999:46); Siepel et al. (1998)).

A Sierra Club study reported that county assessors in at least eight states lowered property taxes for neighbors of factory farms.

~ William J. Weida, *Nutrient Management Issues* (GRACE Factory Farm Project, Apr. 4, 2001) (citing Sierra Club, *Property Tax Reductions* (Mar. 13, 2000)).

A study in Berks County, Pennsylvania evaluated the impact of potential local disamenities on neighboring properties. It found that the impacts of CAFOs on neighboring property values did not vary significantly by species or by differences in the sizes of the operations.

~ Richard Ready & Charles Abdalla, *The Impact of Open Space and Potential Local Disamenities on Residential Rural Property Values in Berks County, Pennsylvania* i (Penn. State Univ., Staff Paper No. 363, June 2003).

This study evaluated the influence of proximity to swine facilities on the sale price of residential properties, using a GIS-based hedonic model. The study reported that “[r]esults indicate a negative and significant impact on property value from hog operations.” The study also found that the modeling “may be a promising technique for establishing setback guidelines, for assessing property value damages resulting from animal operations, and for evaluating potential property value impacts to surrounding properties when siting a new CAFO.”

~ Milla et al., *Evaluating the Effect of Proximity to Hog Farms on Residential Property Values: A GIS-Based Hedonic Price Model Approach*, 17 *URISA Journal* 27, 30–31 (2005).

A Putnam County, Missouri study found a \$58/acre loss of value for properties within 1.5 miles of a CAFO facility.

~ William J. Weida, *The Evidence for Property Devaluation Due to the Proximity to CAFOs* 6 (Col. College & GRACE Factory Farm Project, Jan. 21, 2002).

Three different North Carolina studies, described in a presentation at the University of Kentucky, found that proximity and animal density have significant, negative impacts on the market values of residential properties.

~ Michael Thomas et al., *A Comparison of Three Recent Hedonic Models of Hog Farm Discommodity in Coastal North Carolina: Evidence of Diseconomies of Scale and Brown Zones* (May 2003) (citing studies of Bruton, Ansine et al., and Kim).

A 2008 University of Northern Iowa study analyzed house sales in Black Hawk County, Iowa to determine the effect of hog CAFOs on property values. It found “large adverse impacts suffered by houses that are very close (within 3 miles) to and directly downwind from a CAFO.”

~ H. Isakson & M. D. Ecker, *An Analysis of the Impact of Swine CAFOs on the Value of Nearby Houses* 19 (Univ. of N. Iowa Technical Report, July 23, 2008).

A 1996 newsletter from EPA’s National Center for Environmental Economics reported on an early North Carolina State University study that used hedonic analysis to make various findings on factory farms and their negative impacts on residential land values.

~ USEPA, National Center for Environmental Economics, *Effects of Hog Operations on Residential Property Values*, 3:12 Newsletter (Dec. 1996).

A recent white paper by the Institute of Science, Technology and Public Policy reported on the negative impacts hog CAFOs have in Iowa, including “marked[] and consistent[]” decreases in land values and quality of life in areas near CAFOs. The report noted a study finding that “[p]roximity to a CAFO can reduce the value of a home by 40%.”

~ Institute of Science, Technology and Public Policy, *Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs): Assessment of Impacts on Health, Local Economies, and the Environment with Suggested Alternatives* 3, 6 (post February 2007) (citing study of Park, Lee, and Seidl).

Articles

This 2001 article in the *Appraisal Journal* explains how CAFOs can negatively impact proximate property values, and lists several factors that should be considered in valuing those properties.

~ John A. Kilpatrick, *Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Proximate Property Values*, 39:3 *Appraisal J.* 301 (2001).

A 2007 article in the *Agriculture and Human Values* journal evaluated studies on industrialized farming and community impacts from the 1930s forward. It reported predominantly detrimental effects, including a decline in real estate values for residences close to hog CAFOs. ~ Lobao & Stofferahn, *The Community Effects of Industrialized Farming: Social Science Research and Challenges to Corporate Farming Laws*, *Agric. & Human Values* (2007).

In Waseca County, Minnesota, a county assessor designed a “smell location chart” to determine reductions in values of properties near feedlots. Factors in the percentage of reduction allowed included the proximity to the feedlot, the number of animals, and the presence of a manure lagoon.

~ Douglas Clement, *Knee Deep in Feedlot Feuds*, *FedGazette*, July 2001.

In January 2007, Indiana residents turned out to testify before the state legislature on a CAFO moratorium bill. One woman testified that a businessman was ““driven to suicidal thoughts because he was unable to sell his home after six years because of the odor from a nearby CAFO.”” Another testified that ““[d]ecreased property value because of CAFOs mean [sic] decreased revenue from property taxes, which means less money for our schools.””

~ Jondi Schmitt, *Hoosiers Voice CAFO Concerns: Proposed Bill Would Put Three-Year Moratorium on Start of Construction*, *South Bend Tribune*, Jan. 30, 2007.

The Indiana House passed a bill in February 2007 that would prohibit new CAFOs within 1 mile of cities, towns, schools, and health facilities. One representative who supported the bill said he “want[ed] the pork industry to grow” in Indiana, but that growth could happen “while having respect to our neighbors.” “CAFOs do decrease property values,” he said.

~ Niki Kelly, *General Assembly: House Restricts Feed Farms*, The Journal Gazette, Feb. 22, 2007.

A Michigan Land Use article reported that a tax tribunal reduced the assessments for properties adjacent to CAFOs. It ordered local officials to reduce the taxable values of at least five rural homes by 35% based on problems with stench from a hog livestock factory, and on “slim sale chances” for the homes.

~ Patty Cantrell, *Michigan Tax Tribunal Recognizes Hog Factory Stench* (Mich. Land Use Inst., Dec. 7, 1999).

This 2004 paper debunked assumptions underlying CAFO-proponent arguments, including those regarding CAFOs and property use. It noted: “CAFOs generate odor, air and water pollution, all of which have a direct impact on neighboring properties. The closer the neighboring property, the more severe the impact is likely to be. . . . The resulting loss of exclusive use by neighboring properties lowers their values and ultimately also lowers the taxes generated from these properties. Suing the offending party for these nuisance activities could potentially compensate the neighboring property owners. To prevent this, factory farming interests have attempted to sponsor legislation to prohibit nuisance suits for agricultural pollution.”

~ William J. Weida, *Considering the Rationales for Factory Farming* (for presentation) 10 (Mar. 5, 2004).

Clark County, Illinois established assessment abatements for fifty residential homes around a hog CAFO in the following order: 30% reduction within ½ mile; 25% reduction within ¾ mile; 20% reduction within 1 mile; 15% reduction within 1 ¼ miles; 10% reduction with 1 ½ miles.

~ William J. Weida, *The Evidence for Property Devaluation Due to the Proximity to CAFOs* 6 (Col. College & GRACE Factory Farm Project, Jan. 21, 2002).

A 2006 article in the *Journal of Ecological Anthropology* recognized the ill effects of factory farms on neighboring properties: “In addition to their negative effects on the local economy and tax base, large corporate operations are the source of environmental issues that threaten the property values of rural and urban residents. This strains the economic base and places higher burdens of taxation on remaining residents.”

~ Barbara J. Dilly, *Tax Policy and Swine Production in Iowa*, United States, 10 J. Ecological Anthropology 45, 48 (2006).

A Peoria, Illinois newspaper reported that county officials lowered property values for at least 20 people with homes within two miles of a large sow farm and its odor. The tax board decreased assessments by 30% for neighbors with 1 ½ miles of the operation, and 10% for those within 2 miles of the facility.

~ *Board Smells Lower Land Values near Hog Farm*, The Journal Star, May 6, 1998, at A1.

An Iowa paper reported on the results of the University of Northern Iowa study mentioned above. One interviewee said that his neighbor had been offered \$1 million for his land before plans for a hog lot were announced, but that after the announcement, “the would-be buyer walked away.” “He lost almost \$1 million right there And it’s not necessarily smell. It’s psychological They don’t want anything to do with them (hog lots) if they see them.” Another interviewee, who had recently bought

land in the area, said she “would not have bought the house and all the surrounding property . . . at above market value . . . if a CAFO was going to be built a mile away. . . . And to tell you the truth, I’ll sell my property at a huge loss to move away if they build these things.”

~ *UNI Study: Hog Lot Cuts up to 15% off Nearby Home Values*, Waterloo Courier, Mar. 12, 2007.

A 2006 Letter to the Editor in opposition to proposed legislation that would weaken Michigan’s environmental laws described the “severe pollution” that CAFOs cause. The author explained that the growing number of CAFOs in Michigan was “threatening our public health, our rural communities and the viability of Michigan’s 52,000 farms.” She also noted that “[t]he stench from CAFOs has led to reductions in property values of up to 70 percent by the Michigan Tax Tribunal for nearby residents no longer able to enjoy or sell their homes.”

~ Anne Woiwode Letter to the Editor, *Animal Sewage from Livestock Farms Threatens Communities*, Kalamazoo Gazette, May 15, 2006.

In February 1998, residents of Caribou, Maine petitioned the city council for a temporary ban on factory pig farms. Among concerns were “strong odor from waste, surface and ground water contamination and plummeting property values.”

~ Gloria Flannery, *Caribou Councilors Seek Ban on Piggery; Fears of Pollution, Odor Lead to Ordinance Proposal*, Bangor Daily News, Feb. 25, 1998.

In an article summarizing newspaper coverage of concerns about large-scale swine facilities (LSSF) in Illinois, a “distinct undercurrent” of claims against the facilities was that they were “difficult for communities.” Specifically, “[s]ources were concerned that LSSF were socially disruptive: they went against traditional community values, destroyed the community’s history, violated ethics of neighborliness, and created community conflict. In addition, they were concerned that the community would have to develop infrastructure capacity to handle the effects of LSSF, paying for social services, schools, and health care for migrant workers and cleaning up spills and abandoned lagoons. Those opposed to LSSF also maintained that the large-scale operations had no overall economic benefit for communities because they displaced more jobs than they created, decreased property values and made alternative industries, such as tourism, less viable.”

~ A.E. Reisner, *Newspaper Coverage of Controversies about Large-Scale Swine Facilities in Rural Communities in Illinois*, 83:11 J. Animal Sci. (Nov. 1, 2005).

Coverage of the 2007 Food and Family Farm Presidential Summit in Iowa noted that “many neighbors say the [CAFOs] stink up the air and foul the water, devastate their property values, and drive small farmers out of business.”

~ Jennifer Jacobs, *Candidates Tout Their Farm Credentials*, Des Moines Register, Nov. 11, 2007.

Cases

In a 1997 Indiana Tax Court case, property owners asserted that a state board did not adequately consider the negative effects a proximate hog operation had on their neighborhood when assessing their property. To support their claim that odors from the operation impaired the enjoyment of their property, the plaintiffs presented two jars of air taken from their yard to the hearing officer. The Tax Court held that the plaintiffs met their burden of proving their assessment was incorrect based on the proximate hog operation’s effect on the desirability of

their neighborhood. Relevant evidence that the plaintiffs presented included the two jars of air “redolent with swine” (though unopened, the hearing officer conceded they would smell bad), and verbal testimony about how the odor impaired the enjoyment of their property (they were unable to play tennis, open windows, or hang clothes out).

~ *Corey v. State Bd. of Tax Comm’rs*, 674 N.E.2d 1062, 1063, 1065-66 (Ind. Tax. Ct. 1997) (reversing state board’s assessment on these grounds).

In a case before Indiana’s Court of Appeals that was basically a zoning challenge to a proposed CAFO, some people who lived near the proposed CAFO presented evidence that their property values would decline if the CAFO were built. They presented testimony by their Township Assessor, who said:

The first thing that has to happen if this hog operation goes in, is the neighborhood value will have to be lowered from a good to a fair or a poor [T]here’s some houses like Flynns [sic], Bowmans and Jerry Marsh’s, David Helt’s there’s some of them that the Sexton’s house, there’s two of them there that are pretty new houses, Steve Bowman’s sister just built a new house up there. I wouldn’t be surprised if they wouldn’t drop 30 percent, I don’t think it would be out of the question. So the property values will decrease in this area.

The Court held that the testimony was enough to show that the people near the proposed CAFO would “suffer a pecuniary loss” if the CAFO permit were granted.

~ *Sexton v. Jackson County Bd. of Zoning Appeals*, 884 N.E.2d 889, 893-94 (Ind. App. 2008).

In 2002, a Nebraska Court held that a tax commission should have considered the effect of a nearby factory farm on a taxpayer’s property value. The taxpayer presented evidence from an appraiser who “considered that a potential buyer would take into account the odor produced by the hog farrowing facility,” and adjusted the property’s value downward for that and other reasons. The Court made several strong statements illustrating its conviction that factory farms impact neighboring property values:

In the context of negotiations between a willing buyer and seller to arrive at fair market value, the neighboring hog facility and the house’s location would unquestionably affect the market value of Livingston’s house. Any other conclusion would mean that two identical houses, one located next to the railroad switching yard and the other next to the country club golf course, have identical values – an obviously arbitrary and illogical conclusion that no reasonable person would reach. . . .

That many potential buyers would not look favorably upon the hog facility, and judge the home’s value with reference thereto, is demonstrated by some well-known Nebraska cases in which homeowners have successfully sued hog facility owners for damages caused by interference with the use of their nearby homes. . . .

No reasonable fact finder could conclude that in the real estate marketplace, a potential buyer would not notice, and react economically, to having a large hog facility very nearby while living in a remote location.

~ *Livingston v. Jefferson County Bd. of Equalization*, 640 N.W.2d 426, 431, 437 (Neb. Ct. App. 2002).

In another Nebraska tax case, the state Supreme Court held that an assessor's valuation was "arbitrary and unreasonable" because it did not apply external/locational depreciation to a home that was near a cattle feedlot. The property owner provided testimony about problems with dust, trucks, and flies from the nearby feedlot. In addition, the well for the home was connected to the cattle-watering facility.

~ *Darnall Ranch, Inc. v. Banner County Bd. of Equalization*, 753 N.W.2d 819, 830-32 (Neb. 2008).

In a 1999 South Dakota case, the Court upheld the decision of a land commission to deny a permit for the siting of a hog confinement facility based on, among other things, devaluation of surrounding real estate.

~ *Coyote Flats, LLC v. Sanborn County Comm'n*, 596 N.W.2d 347, 352, 356 (S.D. 1999).

An appellate court in Illinois has recognized that factory farms can decrease neighboring property values. In *Nickels v. Burnett*, the Court upheld a preliminary injunction against building an 8,000-head hog CAFO based in part on "extensive evidence in the form of affidavits and scholarly articles authored by the expert affiants demonstrating that, if the hog facility were to begin operation, plaintiffs would experience substantially harmful health effects and a significant loss of value to their land." The Court found the "harms described were substantially certain to occur should the hog facility begin operations in its present proposed location."

The neighboring plaintiffs alleged that the facility would devalue their properties (among other things). The plaintiffs introduced the affidavit of a professional appraiser, who stated that neighboring property values would be reduced by 18-35%. They also presented affidavits from two doctors who concluded, respectively, that "years of downwind exposure to Hydrogen Sulfide even in low doses can cause permanent brain damage and . . . any exposure must be avoided;" and that "locating the proposed hog facility 3/4 of a mile or less away from homes is likely to cause medical and psychological symptoms to the people living in those homes." Another expert opined that "subjecting the Schmidt and Klein families (the families living closest to the site of the proposed hog operation), to the hog operation odors will significantly increase the likelihood that the two families will experience health problems and that it will cause significant detrimental effects on the quality of their lives." In his opinion, "subjecting the other 13 families, whose homes are located within 3/4 of a mile from the proposed hog operation, to the emissions generated by the proposed hog operation will increase their risk of health problems."

~ *Nickels v. Burnett*, 798 N.E.2d 817, 820, 826 (Ill. App. Ct. 2003); Brief of Appellees at 7-10.

In Pasco, Washington, an appraisal done for litigation purposes found an over 50% reduction in value of a family farm impacted by neighboring CAFO dust, flies, fecal matter, and odor. The CAFO settled the lawsuit by relocating the plaintiffs and buying their farm.

~ John A. Kilpatrick, *Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Proximate Property Values*, 39:3 Appraisal J. 301, 305 (2001).

In Michigan, a horse farm appealed its property tax assessment because it was located near a large scale pork processing facility. The horse farm got a 50% reduction based on airborne externalities and flies.

~ John A. Kilpatrick, *Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Proximate Property Values*, 39:3 Appraisal J. 301, 305 (2001).

In a 2002 Iowa nuisance case, the Court ordered a pork company to pay \$100,000 to homeowners when their home dropped \$50,000 in value after a nearby CAFO was built. The plaintiffs had alleged that the CAFO attracted bugs and harmed their physical and emotional health.

~ Associated Press, *Judge Awards Iowa Couple \$100,000 in Hog Lot Lawsuit*, Amarillo Globe-News, Jan. 12, 2002.

In 1998 in Cedar County, Nebraska, property owners received an assessment reduction based on a neighboring CAFO. On the protest form to the tax board, the property owners stated: "Our neighbor has built a hog confinement and lagoon across the road from our house. This same neighbor has runoff from his cattle yards in to the road ditch 100ft from our well. The nitrates in our water ha[ve] increased making it not safe to drink. We feel a valuation increase of \$35,340 is unfair." The board looked at the property and decided to assess a 25% locational depreciation.

~ Great Plains Environmental Law Center, Case Studies, Cedar County, Property Valuation Protest Form (1998).

In January 2002, in Calhoun County, Iowa, a jury awarded \$76,400 in damages to four property owners who claimed a 4,000-hog operation within a mile of their properties diminished their property values. In another Iowa county, a Court had recently awarded \$100,000 to other property owners for decreased property values from a nearby hog feeding operation.

~ Jerry Perkins, *Jury Sides against Hog-lot Firm: A Total of \$76,400 Will Go to Residents Near the Facility*, Jan. 26, 2002.

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