

Agriculture by Gerald Kopp

Why blame cows?

Wisconsin is enacting a new clean water law that will ruin family farms in the country's premier dairy state.

Wisconsin State Senate Bill 281, passed and signed into law May 1 by Gov. Tommy Thompson, was hailed as a landmark clean water bill by the media. The law mandates a cleanup of the state's watersheds and, as originally written, called for cleanup of construction sites. The major target is the dairy farm sector of Wisconsin, the premier U.S. dairy state.

The Wisconsin law was based on the radical environmentalist assertion that the state's watersheds were threatened by "non-point source" pollution, which is eco-speak for any economic practices that the environmentalists target for shutdown, such as the use of crop chemicals. In the case of Wisconsin, non-point source pollution refers to agriculture, and specifically to dairy farming, where cow manure may be carried along with rainwater runoff after storms into streams and rivers.

As written, the bill required farmers to fence out all streams to livestock, invest in wells to provide water, and invest in costly milkhouse effluent containment systems. The bill further burdens dairy farmers, who are being bankrupted by the thousands as a result of record low milk prices, which remain below breakeven for the second year in a row. Wisconsin has lost 9,000 dairy farms since 1985.

Thompson modified the bill slightly before signing it. As signed, the law directs the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection to find assistance for farmers to clean up milkhouse waste

water, and to have local governments enact ordinances to protect shoreland. The new law also limits the authority of the Department of Natural Resources to enact harsh penalties against non-complying farmers.

Some were dissatisfied with the changes that Governor Thompson made, including the Wisconsin Farmer's Union, which had lobbied hard for the bill, claiming it was a compromise.

The new law mandates that farmers share the cost of this cleanup with the state. This financial burden will destroy many remaining family dairy farms. In addition, the law presents numerous difficulties and regulations that will cost time and money, and create enough inconvenience to drive independent farmers to throw up their hands in disgust and walk away from it all.

And what of the cost-sharing? That is paid for by the taxes that are a hidden cost to consumers for the food they eat.

Farmers are not a naturally selfish crew of profiteers, who refuse to make the investments needed to protect the environment. Food producers need parity prices for their produce, that is, a fair price that covers the cost of production, capital investments, and a fair profit. For decades, U.S. farmers have been chiseled out of fair prices and a decent living.

The foundations which fund the environmentalist movement are tied to the same Wall Street financiers and the commodities cartel companies which have been looting the family

farmer through low prices and high interest rates since the 1950s. The Conservation Foundation is a leading culprit here.

In 1988, the Conservation Foundation published the book *Controlling Non-Point Source Water Pollution: A Citizen's Handbook*, which was the opening broadside against the farmer. The book "suggests" how citizens concerned about pollution of their state's rivers and streams from agriculture and urban runoff can encourage and monitor efforts to assess the state's non-point source pollution problem.

The Conservation Foundation has been promoting efforts since its founding in 1948 to find means to reduce human population levels to "save the environment." Begun with large grants from the Rockefeller and Mellon families, its primary purpose has been to give the eugenics movement a new lease on life after it was discredited by Hitler. The foundation developed a large network of activist environmentalist organizations which could enact its policy pronouncements through channels which would appear to be grass roots.

If a farmer is returned a profit through parity pricing, he will turn those profits into investments to control erosion and other infrastructure, such as manure containment systems, so he can put the manure on the land where it is most useful. He will not push his pastures beyond the normal carrying capacity; he will leave natural grass cover in order to lower erosion rates and buffer the streams from runoff. The family farmer, with his hands-on management and natural concern for his livelihood and his posterity, will care for the land in the best manner.

The best agriculture environment protection act would be to have parity prices and parity international trade.