

EXHIBIT NUMBER: KIL-002
File Name: Killarney
Date: MARCH 13/07
Received by: _____
(Commission Secretary)

CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

HOG PRODUCTION INDUSTRY REVIEW

PUBLIC INPUT HEARING

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MARCH 13, 2007

PRESENTED BY: MIRIAM NICHOL

KILLARNEY, MB.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Commission/Review Panel, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege to present at this very important public hearing for the hog production industry review being conducted at the request of the Manitoba Government. We reviewed the "Guide" published by the Clean Environment Commission and decided to make a presentation based on our experiences and the wisdom we have gained from those experiences in the hog industry.

My husband, Ron, and I have farmed in the Killarney area for 35 years. During that time, we have raised a variety of animals, including pigs. We started out with an old hip roof barn raising mainly feeder pigs. We went from there to a small farrow to finish operation where we cared for the sows in a loose housing structure and farrowed and finished the pigs in a hip roof straw based barn. We progressed from there to moving a neighbour's barn to our farm where we again had a farrow to finish operation. We soon realized that we needed to expand again. So, in 1997, we built a 4800 head nursery barn which we have owned and operated to this day.

Over the years, we have experienced many changes in how we raised and fed our pigs. Our initial experiences in raising pigs would be considered archaic based on how we raise pigs today. In the beginning, we never worried too much about the quality of the feed, about medicating pigs before slaughter or about how we got rid of the manure. Now, we follow very strict rules and regulations for these things plus many other things. When we built our barns in 1997, we were introduced to all of these rules and regulations and we without hesitation, followed them to a tee. Every one of the rules and regulations were implemented in an effort to protect the environment, enhance the health of the pigs/workers in the barns and satisfy the consumers of our pigs. How things have changed in 35 years!

We believe that the way we raise pigs today is far superior to the way we raised pigs in 1972. Today, the pigs are fed a feed ration that is developed by nutritionists and it is based on the age and size of the pigs. The pigs are housed in a climate controlled environment which in many cases is superior to the housing of some of the people living in our province. We follow strict protocols of the Canadian Quality Assurance program that ensures appropriate withdrawal times for all medication, addresses any incidents of broken needles plus many other quality assurance details. The nutrients in the manure are carefully assessed and injected into our spread fields based on nutrient and soil analyses.

Given the scope of the investigation, we have the following comments to make about the issues the CEC is particularly interested in. We recognize and value the scientific evidence and the expertise that is available in regards to these issues. In addition, there is ongoing research being conducted on these various issues which will in turn, change hog production practices in the future. We have grouped some of the issues outlined in the CEC Guide simply for ease of presenting and to avoid duplication of comments.

Nutrient Management, Manure Management and Soil Analysis

The rules and regulations in place for applying hog manure to spread fields provide protection to the environment. As mentioned earlier, the nutrients of the manure are carefully determined and the manure is injected into our spread fields based on the nutrient and soil analyses. Once the nutrient content is determined, manure is managed to benefit crop production with minimal risk to soil and groundwater contamination.

The manure contains a number of nutrients besides nitrogen and phosphorus that add to the organic structure of the soil. These nutrients eliminate the need for synthetic fertilizers and many of the manure nutrients are not found in synthetic fertilizers. Therefore, for the grain farmer, the cost of fertilizing a crop is substantially reduced and the soil is given other micro-nutrients e.g. potassium, sodium, calcium, etc. Not all of the manure nutrients are immediately available to the crop with approximately a quarter of the organic nitrogen being available in the first year and decreasing amounts becoming available during the next three years at a decreasing rate.

It is interesting to note that although all livestock sectors are governed by these regulations, it is our observation that the hog industry is probably the most compliant and forward thinking in regards to environmental stewardship activities. Another observation is that there is no government monitoring of the application of synthetic fertilizers – the only person monitoring the application of synthetic fertilizers is the farmer. In the majority of cases, farmers voluntarily follow the soil analyses results because synthetic fertilizers are expensive and no one wants to waste money on excessive use – just as no one wants to waste manure as it also comes with a price tag.

Groundwater Quality, Groundwater Supply and Surface Water Quality

As the majority of the contents of the lagoons are essentially water and the contents of the lagoons (in most cases) are being injected into the spread fields based on nutrient and soil analyses and with setbacks from waterways, it is difficult to understand that there would be concern with these issues. The hog industry sets a wonderful example of “recycling” the lagoon contents into valuable crop nutrients. In addition, it has been our observation that with spring application of the lagoon contents, the germination of crops is enhanced as a result of the extra moisture provided and this ultimately increases the probability of higher yields in the fall. This has been especially noted when spring moisture levels are low.

We regularly test our well water to ensure that there are no changes in the quality of our water. Our well provides water to the pigs and to our house; therefore we drink the same water as the pigs drink. Our well is located approximately half way between our house and barns. We have full confidence in the integrity of our earthen storage lagoon – confidence that we did not have when our pigs were housed in the loose housing structure and our hip roof barn.

We believe that the government regulations and the hog industry ensure that every possible measure is taken to protect our groundwater and surface water quality. We further believe that the Manitoba government should be protecting our groundwater quality and surface water quality by reviewing the waste disposal practices of our cities/towns/villages/members of the general public living on waterfront properties to ensure that our lakes and waterways are not being polluted.

Odour

As with any industry, there are times when there is more odour than other times. We live in a farming community and our livelihoods depend on livestock and grain. There is odour from any and all animal waste – including human lagoons – as well as from certain grains. Human perception is a huge factor as odour affects humans differently. For example, one person may find the odour of something very offensive while the next person doesn't notice it.

Our barns are located less than two hydro poles away from our house. We acknowledge that there are times that there is an odour. However, we had our daughter's wedding in our front yard in the latter part of July and for all of the festivities, there was no odour.

With the ongoing research and improved management practices, we have full confidence that odour issues will continue to be increasingly minimized in the future.

Disease Transmission

Aside from the fact that the Manitoba Government was encouraging farmers to diversify, one of the main reasons that we decided to build a nursery barn and operate within a three site production system was for the strong evidence that it maximizes disease control. We follow strict bio-security practices which assist in mitigating disease transmission. With my pre-retirement life being a nurse, it is my impression that the bio-security protocols followed in our barn often exceed infection control practices followed in hospitals. In addition, the health of the pigs is closely monitored on a regular basis by a veterinarian.

The distance from neighbouring barns and hog transportation routes are factors that are seriously considered when determining the site for a new barn. It is our experience that hog producers are sensitive to each other's existing locations and practice due diligence in the control of any outbreaks.

Climate Change

This is an interesting one as there is so much media talk about global warming. Yet on the other hand, we watched a program on the Discovery Channel that showed there is evidence that we may be entering another ice age. We believe that it is **EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY - NOT JUST THE HOG INDUSTRY** - to take reasonable steps to ensure minimal pollution of our environment. Singling out the hog industry in such a drastic manner by putting a pause on all new construction of hog barns does not foster an environment of co-operation and mutual responsibility. It points the finger at one sector – a sector that has apparently impacted water quality by a mere 1% - with no action being taken toward the big offenders. We have one question – why did the Manitoba Government not impose a “pause” on all new construction including other industries and housing especially in areas where the population is the most dense?

Environmental Liability

Just as it is everyone's responsibility to take reasonable steps to ensure minimal pollution of our environment, it is also the Manitoba government's responsibility to ensure that there are appropriate rules and regulations in place for **ALL** Manitobans and that those rules and regulations are reasonable, achievable and enforced. Education is a key component of environmental stewardship with equitable application of rules and regulations.

Final Thoughts

It is noted under "The Scope of the Investigation" in the Guide to Public Participation in the Clean Environment Commission Hog Production Industry Review that:

"...the focus of this Investigation to be an inquiry into the impact of the hog-production industry on the indefinite sustainability of Manitoba's physical and biological world. The Commission also notes that Manitoba's Principles and Guidelines for Sustainable Development stress the inter-relationship of the economic, environmental, social and human health decision-making, recognizing that the decisions made in one sphere have impacts on the others."

"Indefinite sustainability of Manitoba's physical and biological world" is a long time and a huge undertaking. We believe that if it is the desire of the Manitoba government to do this, then it is important for the government to look at **ALL** of the factors impacting on Manitoba's physical and biological world.

The hog industry in the Killarney area has provided jobs and a rural lifestyle for many of our young people – not only in the barns but also in the all of the "spin off" jobs. It has provided a multitude of other economic spin offs within the town of Killarney and has provided an increased assessment which in turn benefits all of our residents.

In the Rural Municipality of Turtle Mountain, there are several proposed new barns now on hold as a result of the "pause" imposed by the Manitoba Government. The government's action has negatively impacted on our rural economic development. In addition, one of the local contractors who is in the business of building these barns is heading to Alberta with his crew of 8-10 people to work there for the next ten months. We all know what happens to people who go to Alberta to work – the vast majority does not come back to Manitoba!

The more that we think about what has happened as a result of the Manitoba government's actions toward the hog industry, the more we think that this whole process is nothing but "smoke and mirrors" in an election year – something to camouflage other more important issues that the public should be addressing. In the meantime, Manitoba loses out again with economic growth and development – something that is very much needed in this province – both rural and urban. It would be great if the Manitoba Government focused on things that would turn our province into a "have" province instead of the "have not" status we currently hold.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views regarding this important matter.