

PRESENTATION
TO THE
CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
HEARINGS

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By: Marg Rempel
Rempelco Acres Ltd.
Box 52, R.R.1
Ste. Anne, MB, R5H 1R1

Commissioners, staff, fellow presenters, friends and neighbors,

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in these province-wide hearings focusing on hog production and related practices in our province.

My name is Marg Rempel. I am a farmer. I own and operate a mixed farm here in the Rural Municipality of Hanover. My farm, Rempelco Acres Ltd., consists of a 500 sow farrow to finish hog enterprise and 1500 acres of cropland on which I grow cereal grains, oilseeds, as well as some forage crops. My late husband's family began farming where I am currently located, in 1957, making this year a 50 year mark for the Rempel family. Hogs became an important part of the farm in 1967, and production has continued since that time, growing gradually to the present size. I joined the Rempel family in 1975, and farmed with my husband until his passing in 2003, and since that time, have been farming on my own.

Hog production has been a very important component in my farm's sustainability, in every aspect. It has allowed the farm to provide full-time employment to three people, in addition to part-time employment to my three now young adult children. Hog production has provided a very important natural, organic source of soil fertility for our cropland. Hog production has been central to the financial sustainability of my farm, meaning among other things, a tax contribution to the RM of Hanover of well over \$20,000 annually, and approximately \$1.5 million of direct economic activity annually here in southeastern Manitoba. In relative terms, I am a small producer, however, I feel even as a smaller producer, my farm makes a significant contribution to my local community and to my province.

Our family farm has always been working toward doing what is best for our environment, long before "environment" became a politically expedient topic. The environment has been the priority for me and my family, not because it happens to be "politically correct" at the moment, but because our livelihood absolutely depends on taking the best care possible of the land which sustains us. That is the most basic fundamental of farming, and every farmer knows that.

One of the environmental focuses we have always made a priority on our farm is that of reducing transportation, (despite I might add, the political decisions which continue to frustrate that priority, such as tearing up of rail lines, removing local grain elevators, etc.). I try as much as possible, to reduce the distance needed farm inputs must travel, as well as reducing the distance outputs must travel. My hogs are raised from birth to market weight on one site, eliminating transportation to additional sites. As much land as possible is fertilized with hog manure, all within a one mile radius of the barns. I grow most of the feed grains my hog enterprise requires on my own land, reducing the fuel required to haul it in, as well as the impact on our roads and highways. An on-farm mill prepares the various rations daily. Grain corn is harvested and stored in a sealed silo as high moisture grain, allowing for earlier harvesting of the crop, eliminating the energy required to dry the corn to a point where it can be stored in conventional bins, and moving the harvested corn only once, that is, from the field to the corn silo, from where it goes directly into the mill

as needed. Using a computerized liquid feeding system allows for the use of high moisture grain in our rations. Hog manure is stored in a three-celled earthen lagoon, and injected into the soil after harvest each year. Soils are tested, as are the manure samples, and all application best practices and regulations are adhered to. Global Positioning Systems allow us to map manure application and are also used for greater cropping precision and a consequent reduction in fuel consumption in all areas of seeding, caring for, and harvesting our crops. Crop residues are re-incorporated into the soils, constantly adding to the organic matter, an important contribution to the health of our heavy clay soils here in southeastern Manitoba. Rempelco Acres is fully certified under the Canadian Quality Assurance Program for Hog Producers, a program which requires detailed record keeping of all procedures and production practices, and includes an annual review, inspection and verification.

That is a very brief snapshot of my own farming operation. It is a descriptive snapshot, not a prescriptive one. Every farm has its own unique advantages as well as challenges.

I would like to use the rest of my presentation time this afternoon to address the “bigger picture” if I may. Over the thousands and thousands of years that agriculture has developed, it has only been in the past forty or fifty years that crop production has become so reliant on petroleum-based nitrogen fertilizer. I doubt that forty or fifty years into the future the petroleum-based option will exist for farmers. It is not an economically sustainable soil nutrient source, in the long term. Costs of nitrogen fertilizers have increased 50 to 80 percent in the past six months, and we are being warned of shortages already for this spring’s seeding season, irrespective of the formidable cost.

Farmers have traditionally born the responsibility of food production, however the focus is quickly adding on a responsibility for fuel production as well. Crops only grow well in well-nurtured soil, and I’m here to say to you, that animal manure is an extremely important component in maintaining and increasing soil productivity. Manure is NOT a waste product. It is a vitaly important resource – part of the completely natural, organic, very holistic nutrient cycle. To curtail production of animal manure is extremely short-sighted and ill-conceived. Manitoba and the rest of the prairies are in a huge manure-deficit position. We need not only increased hog production, but also increases in production of cattle, sheep, goats, etc. The future of our food production depends on it. Twenty years ago I told my fellow farmers that some day we would raise hogs primarily for their manure and secondarily for their meat. That prediction is apparently already a reality in some parts of the US corn belt.

In our province and in our country, at least 98 out of every 100 people live in urban centres. They have fled from the rural communities, and from farming for a variety of reasons, which include:

- the hours are too long
- the work is too hard
- the return on investment is too small
- the amenities are too few

- the areas are too isolated
- the financial stakes are too high
- the vulnerability to weather is too stressful.

That's fine. We live in a democracy and each individual has the right to choose where they wish to live, and how they wish to make their living. But I am one of those minority one or two percent of the population who believes that the most important, the most fundamental component of any healthy, successful society is its food production and distribution systems. For those ninety-eight or ninety-nine percent of the population, who want nothing to do with the risks, exposures, and plain hard work of farming, to now turn and sit in uninformed judgment on those few people still left producing food in the countryside; that is what is so painful for farmers. We have accepted the responsibility for producing safe, high quality food of a consistent and constant quantity, for all of our urban citizens, and we accept that responsibility because we are acutely aware that our society would collapse without us, even though it feels like a rather lonely awareness at times. We have accepted all the risks and challenges that come with food production, and some of us have gone broke and died because of the willingness to sacrifice everything for the common good. That's part of what makes farmers who they are: very tenacious, resilient, and eternally optimistic by nature.

To encourage responsible application of animal manure is appropriate. What is so discouraging for us as food producers, are "regulations" (often more accurately, "restrictions on production") born, not out of good science or rational debate, but out of the misguided and misinformed emotions of some urbanites, whose main value in our political system is apparently, the number of their votes. Well-meaning though they may be, they are responsible for a significant crippling of food production in our province and in our country. The moratorium on hog production in Manitoba would fall into this category.

The attempt of this province's government and some of its citizens, to place the responsibility for the algae blooms in Lake Winnipeg on hog producers is a travesty. Hog producers have been far ahead of all other Manitoba livestock sectors, as well as non-livestock sectors, in responsible, and highly monitored, manure management and environmental stewardship for many years already. We continue to use vast amounts of our own money to fund research which can direct us into the future in ever more accurate application monitors and equipment, fine tuning feed rations to further reduce amounts of excreted phosphorus, and so on. We accept that we may be contributing 1% of the phosphorus entering Lake Winnipeg and will continue to work hard to reduce that amount. However, for the government and people of this province to focus on that 1% is very short-sighted. The repercussions of putting on hold the sector of agriculture which has been the most viable sector over the past two decades, will unfortunately be felt for a very long time.

The second greatest frustration and disappointment has been the abdication of support from our elected representatives. Publicly funded research in the area of agriculture has declined very significantly and seriously over the past fifteen years. The vast majority of research is now producer funded, and is a huge financial burden which farmers cannot

continue to bear over the long term. However, even more disappointing is the complete lack of public political support for primary food producers. No one in leadership is standing up and saying anything about the crucial importance of food production in our society. I and my colleagues have every confidence that you, as commissioners of this current set of hearings, will do your jobs with thorough diligence, equity and fairness, and complete competence – just as numerous previous commissions have done. There are shelves piled high with reports on livestock production, especially including hog production, in Manitoba. As I stated earlier, I am indeed appreciative and grateful for the opportunity to make a presentation to the Commission. Unfortunately, I and my fellow farmers, have very little confidence that those to whom you will hand your final report, will have the courage to stand up and act on the report; to speak a word of appreciation and support for those who are providing their daily food.

Every society which fails to honor the fundamental and crucial importance of primary food production is doomed to fail. History is full of examples.