

My name is Rick Vaags, my father Bill Vaags and myself are from the Dugald area. For forty-five years we have been involved in both grain and hog production. I would like to talk about the history of our farm in relation to the topics of this hearing.

When my dad started out in the sixties, he had four hundred and eighty acres and two hundred pigs. The scale of economics has dictated to expand by purchasing land and local barns when they became available. Today our farm has expanded to twelve hundred sows farrow to fifty pounds, and farm just under four thousand acres. We employ five full time staff members outside the family. We are considered a small producer for feeder pig sales and consequently our available pigs per week are not as attractive to a buyer as the larger groups would be.

We have gone from a fifteen hundred gallon tank broadcasting manure for three weeks from one barn to the present hiring custom applicators and injecting entire operations annual Manure volume over four hundred acres in three days. This transformation has taken us from fifteen hundred to four thousand gallon tankers to big gun sprinkler, to building our own injector, and finally hiring custom applicators. We use crops that can utilize manure nutrients effectively so manure injections are followed by canola, corn, or winter wheat. Other crops used to go deeper in later rotations

are sunflowers and Alfalfa.

Manure management plans have been reported since becoming mandatory to both the municipality as well as the conservation department.

Annual water sampling was done with the Feed Company long before it became compulsory by the province, and have not noticed any changes in the reports from previous years.

If I look back over the last thirty years what we did for manure application was similar to the small farms we took over. We do soil testing on every field every year. We know that what livestock farms used to do was spread manure as close to the yard as possible. Over time this has evolved to be much more of an awareness of the balance of nutrients from manure and crop removal rate. The quality of our soil has improved as our best crops are always on manure injected land. We have two thousand one hundred acres within pumping distance of our farm and want to bring all the acres into manure management area.

Odor from the operation I believe has decreased over the years as application and agitation times have been drastically reduced. I am convinced most hog farms as ours have been educated and evolved over the years and are concerned about being good stewards of the land and water. We live within four hundred feet of the barns and drink the same well water. I want to leave the soil and water in as good of a

condition, should one of my four sons or anyone else taking over this farm after me.

As attitudes change towards manure storage I would hope that the governments will assist in the cost of improvements to a greater extent than currently for existing operations. Thru the Environmental Farm Plan there is provision for 30% Funding as well as the Conservation Department adding \$5000. In neighboring provinces I understand this amount of funding to be 90%.

I am very concerned about the directions the province has taken in their so-called “pause” on the hog industry. I don’t hear of a pause on any other phosphorus-producing sector whether it be agricultural, residential, or recreational. Why should the most proactive agricultural sector be continually scrutinized while others are not even on the radar. As a U of M soil scientist wrote in a recent letter to the editor, “the phosphorus issue has been contributed to by a lot of areas, let’s stop pointing fingers and work together to resolve the issues.”

Thank you