



Photo by JOHN FROEHLING

Stu Harrison displayed recent front pages of the Chicago Tribune with photos and stories about the increasing number and size of large hog confinements popping up in Illinois. Current state law does

not provide any avenues for neighbors to oppose them. Harrison addressed the Fulton County Board concerning a 20,000-hog confinement proposed near his family's farm in the Ipava area.

Hog confinements stir alarm

County Board urged to demand changes in Illinois' weak law as 20,000-hog facility proposed near Ipava

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Broken promises on large hog confinements, poorly or unscrupulously managed operations, and a state agency responsible to promote and regulate them may lead to cheaper pork for consumers but leave others crying out for change.

"The act is a toothless tiger," said former state Appellate Court

Justice and former Republican legislator Jody Koehler in one of a recent series of front page stories in the Chicago Tribune. "The people are stuck, they are just stuck."

The Illinois Livestock Management Facilities Act offers few tools to hold confinement facility owners accountable. Common zoning changes proposed require neighbors to be notified, but large hog confinements may spring up without warning.

The Tribune noted 900 permits have been issued in the last 20 years. Over a 10-year period, more than 490,000 fish in 67 miles of rivers were killed due to spills of hog waste. The state attorney general's office filed a civil suit over a fish kill against one operator that was settled in 2011 for \$17,500 with no admis-

sion of wrongdoing.

Koehler asked legislators to extend setbacks from a quarter-mile to two miles from a residence, intensify inspections on environmentally sensitive land and give neighbors standing to oppose confinements in civil court. Nothing happened.

What goes around ...

Stu Harrison of Canton presented some Tribune front pages as he spoke up to five minutes to the Fulton County Board. He also provided board members copies of a letter he wrote to officials of the Illinois Department of Agriculture which has siting authority over hog confinements.

Harrison said his family farms in the area of a proposed 20,000-hog confinement between Ipava and Bernadotte. He urged the

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County Board to pass a resolution demanding changes in the law on concentrated animal confinements in Illinois, so people can live in a healthy environment and clean air and water are maintained as Article 11 of the state constitution requires.

He said he and his wife Michaeline Harrison are both real estate brokers and think the market value of their family farm will fall if that hog confinement is approved. It is the wrong location for several reasons, he said.

The letter notes Runway Ridge LLC has proposed a confinement on Airport Road in Bernadotte Township to house 8,052 hogs weighing more than 55 pounds each and 12,856 pigs each weighing less than 55 pounds.

"Our family owns farmland across the road to the northeast of this facility," he wrote. "The proposed facility would be sited across from the residence of Paul Stoops, who has lived there 78 years."

Stoops' place is referred to as a "non-farm residence" in the siting application, yet he owns 180 acres of farmland there and has farmed it. Also, part of Stoops' house is within the 1,760-foot setback area, the letter said.

Site drawings failed to include the potable well and living quarters at Rob Jockisch's horse farm (RJ's Riding Stable, Trail Park and Center), located less than

100 feet from the proposed confinement property.

Site drawings omitted two forks of the Tater Creek watershed as well.

Another concern is the Elrod Schoolhouse a quarter-mile down the road from the proposed site.

Historical status is sought for it as the Elrod Schoolhouse Community Center to ensure Dr. Leland Ladd's original vision as a "museum/community service gathering place" will continue in the future, the letter said.

Local control needed

Harrison also expressed concern about how concentrated animal confinements are approved by the state Agriculture Department without local county board support.

Local support is required in the approval process for landfills.

"Local communities should have a meaningful voice in making decisions on what projects are approved for their communities, particularly those proposed by non-local absentee owners or non-local businesses that will extract any economic benefit derived from the operation outside of the community," his letter said.

He urged denial of the application.

The letter was addressed to Illinois Department of

Agriculture Executive Raymond Poe, Warren Goetsch of the department's Executive Offices and Brad Beaver of the department's Environmental Programs, P.O. Box 19281, Springfield, IL 62794-9281. A copy was sent to Governor Bruce Rauner as well.

Others also spoke to the County Board this month about particulates and gases emitted by highly concentrated hog confinements, posing risks to health regardless of odor.

County Board Chairman Bob Bucher said the Illinois Department of Agriculture has had control over siting animal confinements since 1996.

'People that care'

Bucher said he and board member Lisa Joachim recently visited a family farm near Lincoln with a confinement of 5,500 to 6,000 hogs at any given time. The family has farmed there for generations.

"We could not smell it. I was impressed with it for that many animals," Joachim said. "They took very good care of these animals. They grind their own feed on site."

"They are people that care," said Bucher, adding they are good neighbors and never have complaints. "I think some big corporation-owned farms are not as well managed."