



[#wish4waterWI](#)

You have to stick your neck out. How can we not?

Manure Spreading

Kewaunee County is drowning in manure. There are more than 75,000 head of livestock in the county, over triple the number of people living. Dairy animals alone produce nearly one and a half million tons of manure annually.

The manure gets everywhere. It contaminates people's drinking water wells. It runs off farm fields and flows down the rivers to Lake Michigan and, once there, does its job as fertilizer, growing massive, stringy, smelly and even toxic crops of algae. Though they're not allowed to do so yet, farmers want to spray manure through big irrigation sprinklers. Their non-farming neighbors think it's best not to hang their laundry outside on the days farmers irrigate with cow manure.



In spring, people turn on their taps and see their water running brown. Manure-laden snow or rain flows through cracks in the ground. With no crops to take up the water or the manure, this contaminated water runs right to the aquifer – the source of people's drinking water. Homeowners are forced to drill deeper wells, but sometimes even that doesn't protect them.

About a third of 560 wells tested in Kewaunee County in 2014 show contamination at some level by farm runoff. Coliform bacteria, nitrates and even salmonella are being discovered in people's drinking water. Homeowners can't and won't drink contaminated water; some fear even bathing in it.



Citizens in Kewaunee County are angry. This problem has been well documented for years, yet the dairy industry continues an unrelenting march toward bigger farms, more cows and more manure.

A state task force concluded in 2006 that Kewaunee County soils and the bedrock underneath it made the drinking water supply very vulnerable to contamination. The dairy industry challenged the task force's findings, and nothing was done. Legislation was proposed in 2010, but the dairy industry immediately opposed it, claiming (falsely) that the people calling for clean water and more responsible farming practices wanted to ban manure spreading altogether, and therefore ban dairy farming.

It's not just groundwater being contaminated by manure. The city of Algoma, nestled on the shore of Lake Michigan, has – or had – a popular swimming beach. By July most years, the runoff from farms has so fouled Lake Michigan that thick, green waves of algae wash up on Algoma's beach, accompanied by a putrid smell. On hot days in Algoma, the beach is devoid of bathers.

In a testament to the power of citizens advocating for clean water, the Kewaunee County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously for an ordinance limiting the timing and location of manure spreading on lands sensitive to groundwater contamination. (Each of the county's townships must approve it separately.) That county will need to do much more to protect its aquifers and Lake Michigan, but the ordinance was a very important first step.

Susan Connor



Always curious and always exploring, Susan Connor grew up in the small town of Laona, nestled among the lakes of the Nicolet National Forest. She traveled south to Madison and Milwaukee while pursuing degrees and a career, but eventually landed, happily, on the shores of Lake Michigan in Algoma in pursuit of a dream. Little did she know that a few years later that dream would be threatened by polluted water – water so polluted by farm runoff that she won't even let her dog swim in her beloved Lake Michigan.

It was Connor's time in Milwaukee that really solidified her love for the great lake. She had received her degree in accounting from UW-Madison and spent several years as a CPA before changing course and heading to Milwaukee to study Library & Information Science. Soon Connor began considering another shift and decided to look for her dream home and her next adventure, which brought her to Algoma. With an idea already in mind for a combined garden and gallery space, she met her future business partner and, after many months of research and hard work, they opened The Flying Pig.



[The Flying Pig Gallery & Greenspace](#), which just celebrated its 11th anniversary, aims to provide an amusing, inspiring and educational peek at art and gardens. It's also a business that relies heavily on tourist traffic. Being doubly invested in the area because both her home and business are on the lake, Connor has been devastated to see the decline in water quality in Lake Michigan – not to mention significant groundwater contamination issues – due to the significant increase in industrial agriculture and manure runoff.

Knowing she had to use her voice to fight for her lake, her home and her business, Connor has been a catalyst for bringing together concerned community members. Although the group started more informally, meeting for coffee at the Flying Pig on Friday mornings, they have gained support and momentum and have formed [Restore Kewaunee](#), which describes itself as a community voice responding to the presence of industrial agriculture in Kewaunee County.

"People like to blame Milwaukee for our water problems up here, but the lake doesn't flow that way. People also like to blame the geese and seagulls," Connor says. "In working to address the problem, you have to look at what has changed that might be causing it. The geese and seagulls have been here forever, but all this industrial agriculture hasn't. It's like Kewaunee County has been sleeping, and we're trying to wake them up."