Harassment and Intimidation Against
Frontline Families Fighting the Factory Farm Next Door

My family has endured repeated harassment and intimidation since my elderly parents, Lowell and Evelyn Trom, filed their first lawsuit against Dodge County and area swine factory farm operators in May 2014, challenging installation of the 11th swine factory farm in a 3-mile radius of our farm. The harassment and intimidation is never-ending—constant garbage dumped in our roadside ditches and driveway, dumping of blue farm booties every few feet along the township road, a large piece of metal that was hidden in the tall grass and damaged our mower, bullet holes that were shot in the stop sign just a few hours after my brother and I pulled weeds from the field just a few feet away, pure Roundup that was sprayed on the neighbor’s corn field and caused thousands of dollars of damage (which we are quite confident was intended for our field given the proximity to other events), harassing late night phone calls to my father, including such comments as “Have you changed yet?” and other harassing tactics. In an effort to silence me personally, the neighboring hog factory farm operator placed false telephone calls to the Dodge County Sheriff, not to report criminal activity, but to put heat on me personally and get me to shut up.1 Additionally, the industry contacted the Managing Partner of my former law firm, Lindquist & Vennum, which is now part of Ballard Spahr, LLP in an effort to silence my efforts. Even an attorney with a major law firm is not exempt from the heavy-handed tactics of this ruthless industry.

There’s no escaping this harassment—even in death. In a final act of retaliation against my father, Lowell Trom, and our family, industry operatives spread manure onto the land the

1 Call for Service, Dodge County Sheriff’s Office, Incident # 201700009562, Case #201700000864, dated November 11, 2017; see also, Call for Service, Dodge County Sheriff’s Office, Incident # 201700009587, Case #201700000864, dated November 12, 2017.
weekend of my father’s visitation and funeral in October 2019—a common retaliatory tactic employed by industry operators to silence farm families who oppose industrial factory farms. Rather than provide the pomp and circumstance of a 21-gun salute to honor my father’s long life and service to the local community—industry operatives demeaned my father’s life with a ceremonious act of corporate warfare and lathered manure as close as possible to his final resting place. As my brother, Brad, entered the visitation at the local funeral home in Blooming Prairie, he was distracted by a bloody nose due to exposure to dangerous gases emitted from the raw manure spread just steps away. The following day, as my family gathered around my father’s rural gravesite, several family members remained in their vehicles, unable to bear the stench. As my father laid in his final resting place—he ultimately had the last laugh and rested in peace—confident that his kids will stand their ground and won’t back down.

The industry has been successful for years in silencing opposition by calling employers and threatening local businesses, including local newspapers. My family finally had the courage to speak out publicly. The harassment and intimidation experienced by my family is consistent with the pattern of harassment and intimidation targeted at other farm families across rural America who oppose factory farms.

Same industry playbook. Same trademark industry harassment and intimidation tactics. Different frontline communities. Coordination among the ranks—an obvious indication that industry giants are training contract growers to use industry power to intimidate, harass and threaten neighbors who oppose factory farms.

In Iowa, Chris Petersen, an independent hog farmer near Clear Lake, has been very vocal regarding the heavy-handed tactics employed by the industry for over 20 years and has received
his share of death threats over the years. According to Chris, “it’s the price you pay for doing the right thing.”

In Wisconsin, Lynn and Nancy Utseth, organic dairy farmers, similarly reported death threats, following efforts to expose abuses by the dairy industry in Kewaunee County which boasted 14 dairy CAFOs in 2015 and produced untreated waste equivalent to 924,882 humans.² Lynn and Nancy, who described intimidation tactics as a “daily occurrence,” were placed on a “black list” by the Wisconsin DNR along with ten others.

In Michigan, Lynn Henning, who farms with her husband near Clayton, discovered dead animals stuffed in her destroyed mailbox and left atop the hood of her vehicle, after her family voiced concern regarding installation of a large factory farm across the road from the Henning farm. That wasn’t enough. Buckshot to a bedroom window occupied by Lynn’s 20-month grandchild shattered the window.

In Illinois, activist Barbara Ashwood³ moderated a meeting of Illinois Citizens for Clean Air and Water, a coalition of family farmers and groups working together to protect rural communities from the devastating effects of large-scale, industrialized livestock production.⁴ Barbara “listened as people spoke of hog carcasses left to rot in the woods, of threats and dead animals dumped on front steps and a bullet shot through a toddler’s window.”⁵ Co-founder Karen Hudson was arrested and charged with jury tampering in a Scott County nuisance action

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³ Barbara Ashwood is founder of the non-profit group Rural Residents for Responsible Agriculture.
⁴ Ashwood, Barbara, Just Say No to CAFOs, March 1, 2019; [https://macopolitan.org/a-cafo-call-to-action-just-say-no-to-polluting-hog-farms/](https://macopolitan.org/a-cafo-call-to-action-just-say-no-to-polluting-hog-farms/).
⁵ Id.
against the industry, charges which were ultimately dismissed following the investigative assistance of David Jackson, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune.

In Missouri, Scott Dye was fired by his employer after he objected to an 80,000-head hog finishing operation near his rural home. Scott, who assisted with a Farm Aid concert featuring country music icon Willie Nelson, worked with local law enforcement officials to ensure Willie’s safety following several death threats by industry operatives.

In the Dakotas, installation of a 6,500-head sow facility just one-half mile from Kathy Tyler’s home near Big Stone City, South Dakota broke the community following threats and harassment to Kathy’s family and others opposed to installation of this mega facility. In neighboring North Dakota, following efforts to fight installation of a 9,000-head swine factory farm near his family farm in Buffalo, farmer and North Dakota State University (“NDSU”) ag economist, Randy Coon, was placed on an “enemies list” by the industry and learned that industry folks contacted NDSU university officials and pressured the department chair to remove him from certain ag studies. Randy wasn’t alone. Business owners in the Buffalo area were also contacted and threatened by industry operatives.

Near Devils Lake, North Dakota, citizens reported threats to local business owners who interfered with industry efforts to install a large gestation sow factory farm proposed by local farmer and retired president of the North Dakota Farm Bureau, Eric Aasmundstad, “half a mile from the shore of Devils Lake.”7 The area, world-renowned for its walleye fishing, generates an

6 Hyatt, Kim, Casselton forum focuses on negative effects of factory farming, The Forum (October 6, 2017).

estimated $97.6 million in annual revenue from fishing activities⁸ and accounts for over half of the Devils Lake area recreational spending.⁹ Devils Lake is a fascinating area, “a closed glacial basin unconnected to any rivers. Devils Lake is fed only by precipitation and runoff and emptied by evaporation alone.”¹⁰ The “lake the town is named for has quadrupled in size over the last two-and-a-half decades, flooding thousands of acres of farmland.”¹¹ The lake has swallowed 130,800 acres.¹² As a result, many of the farmers in the area have had to trade in their tractors to run campsites and other tourism businesses along the expanding waterfront.”¹³ Spirit Lake Nation, a Native American tribe with over 5,500 residents, views the pristine lake waters as an important spiritual site.¹⁴

“The proposed farm is a hog ‘multiplier’ that would supply up to 44,000 piglets a year to other large hog farrowing operations. It would also require keeping around 2,000 sows on hand at all times”¹⁵ and generate an estimated 3.8 million gallons of liquid manure annually.¹⁶ “The

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⁸ Coon, Randy, The Contribution Devils Lake Recreational Activities Make to the North Dakota Economy, Testimony Presented to the North Dakota Department of Health, Devils Lake Public Hearing, In the Matter of: Grand Prairie Agriculture, LLC Permit Application, Devils Lake, ND (September 12, 2018).

⁹ Id.


¹¹ Greenaway, Twilight, Putting a Face on the Rural Fight Against Corporate Farms, The Western Organization of Resource Councils has been an unrelenting grassroots critic of Big Ag for decades. Now its members want to enlist urban eaters in the fight, Civil Eats (March 20, 2018).


¹³ Greenaway, Twilight, Putting a Face on the Rural Fight Against Corporate Farms, The Western Organization of Resource Councils has been an unrelenting grassroots critic of Big Ag for decades. Now its members want to enlist urban eaters in the fight, Civil Eats (March 20, 2018).

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Id.
site is surrounded by wetlands that will drain any waste into Devils Lake,“17 an unpredictable lake which floods often.18 What could possibly go wrong?

There are dozens of unreported stories of harassment and intimidation against rural farm families and local communities by industry operatives, part of the deliberate strategy to corporatize and exert control over rural areas. The power imbalance is palpable in rural America, as local citizens fear that their jobs will be terminated or their businesses threatened if they speak out against the new corporate order. Asked why these tactics have gone unreported for so long, my father, Lowell Trom, emphatically stated, “because people are afraid. But, I’m not afraid.”

Submitted by:
Sonja Trom Eayrs
612 743 1312
sonja.eayrs@gmail.com

16 Coon, Randy, Evaluating the Grand Prairie Agriculture, LLP Nutrient Management Plan, Testimony Presented to the North Dakota Department of Health, Devils Lake Public Hearing, In the Matter of: Grand Prairie Agriculture, LLC Permit Application, Devils Lake, ND (September 12, 2018).

17 Greenaway, Twilight, Putting a Face on the Rural Fight Against Corporate Farms, The Western Organization of Resource Councils has been an unrelenting grassroots critic of Big Ag for decades. Now its members want to enlist urban eaters in the fight, Civil Eats (March 20, 2018).

18 Id.