

KDHE Continues to Indulge Big Hog Producers

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Hog CAFO Lagoons, Missouri | Image: Google Maps

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Using taxpayer funds starting in 1997, Kansas State University (KSU) researched what would happen to elements of manure that seeped through compacted soil liners in huge waste lagoons being employed by hog producers in southwest Kansas. These lagoons sit over the High Plains Aquifer, the regional drinking water source. They found that, after 25 years, as much as 300 tons of nitrogen would collect in a huge mass beneath a single 5.7-acre lagoon. The Kansas legislature had passed statutes in 1998 that required hog producers to prepare a closure plan that would outline how they would remove contamination when the site was abandoned. Then they were supposed to estimate the cost and provide “financial assurance” that they had the means to pay it.

In recent years the Kansas Chapter discovered that KDHE was not requiring permit applicants to align their closure plans with the results of the KSU studies even though KDHE’s “internal policy” stated that producers would need to dig up this nitrogen- saturated material and spread it as fertilizer on nearby fields. We brought up this point in several permit proceedings to no avail.

KDHE must have gotten really bored with us, because in the most recent case, a huge, 5-lagoon sow operation in Morton County, they waited 695 days to respond to our comment and allowed the producer to operate on an expired permit for more than 2 1/2 years. We will keep after them because if this material is not removed or otherwise encapsulated, the nitrogen will eventually add to already high levels of nitrate pollution in groundwater in SW Kansas.