

April 7, 2017

Dear Whatcom Family Farmers, Mr. Rader, and Mr. Likkel:

The Board of Directors at RE Sources for Sustainable Communities received your recent letter in response to our decision to join an appeal of the Department of Ecology Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permit. We welcome the opportunity to explain why we made this decision to strengthen the permit and protect water quality across the entire State of Washington.

To begin with, your letter characterized RE Sources as “anti-farm activists,” yet our supporters are decidedly *PRO*-farm. They are the people who seek out farmers’ markets to purchase local produce and local artisan cheeses, choose to purchase local milk even if it’s more expensive, consume shellfish from our local harbors, and take pride serving local grass-fed beef. RE Sources supporters also include fishermen and hunters, practical conservationists who value knowing that the fish and game they harvest is from lands and waters that are free of toxics and pathogens. To label these local citizens “anti-farm” is simply inaccurate.

At the program level, RE Sources directly supports local farms and farm families by encouraging the purchase and consumption of local produce, eggs, livestock, and more. Our educational programs in schools and the community highlight the innovative efforts of Whatcom farm families to increase organic crop production, reduce the use of chemicals, protect streams and woodlots, create biofuels, and master the difficult work of responsible manure management.

At the public policy level, RE Sources has long been a champion of local agriculture and family farms, advocating for stronger agricultural lands protection in the County Comprehensive plan. We and our supporters have participated in collaborative processes with members of the agricultural community, from WRIA-1 to nitrate pollution monitoring, from preventing urban sprawl into ag zones to enhancing lowland agricultural streams and riverbanks for wildlife, people, and water quality. We have also been involved in *regional* cooperative efforts to preserve and enhance ag lands and rural communities, and to identify threats to those values and the quality of life in our state.

In keeping with our decades-long commitment to the health of our community, and working collaboratively with our friends of the traditional territory, it is incumbent on RE Sources to advocate for the health, safety and recovery of Puget Sound and its tributaries through use of the best available science. Such science points to numerous threats to Puget Sound and its many tributaries throughout Western Washington. We do not believe that the recently released

statewide CAFO permits rely on best available science, or on an adequately rigorous oversight process. These deficiencies will place public health, our environment, and the sustainability of our local farms at continued risk.

Members and supporters of many organizations statewide, including our own, submitted upwards of 4,500 comments on the recent CAFO proposal. Nearly 90% of those comments called for stronger oversight of waste management in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. Our position should surprise no one; it has been consistent for over 20 years. Along with thousands of concerned citizens and groups statewide, RE Sources advocates for strengthening NPDES permits (including those covering construction, boatyards, industrial sites, municipal treatment plants, etc.) to protect air, soil, and water quality.

Our work is not confined to the farming community, the dairy community, or Whatcom County. Because water and air pollution respect no boundaries, the Department of Ecology CAFO permit is a statewide permit. Appealing a weak statewide permit is actually a vote of confidence in Whatcom farmers and those in agriculture across the state who take water quality very seriously; in fact, RE Sources is confident that family farmers in Whatcom County are committed to protecting and improving water and air quality for us, our children, and generations to come. Sadly, that is not the case for many CAFOs across the state, and thus the need exists for a strong and consistent permit process to protect public health and the environment.

We all demand high standards when so much is at stake. High standards for CAFOs, which often create the same daily animal waste as a small city, make sense given the potential for harm to human and environmental health from poor management. We cannot accept a low standard here when mistakes threaten the public, and when the track record of the industry is not particularly good.

The RE Sources community and the farming community share many values. We all believe in clean air, water, and soil for our communities. We believe in citizens working together to build stronger, more resilient communities. We believe that short term profit is beneath our dignity if it impairs the quality of life for future generations. RE Sources supporters, staff, and board view the typical owners of a family dairy farm as some of the most hardworking and honest people in our community. We pledge to honor that respect for our neighbors, and trust that your membership will do likewise. No one gains when political spin governs public discourse.

We will focus on these goals that we share with you. There will always be specific issues on which we do not agree. But if we can work together on those we hold in common, we can make progress. RE Sources is committed to supporting the Tenmile Clean Water Project, and working closely with the Laurel WID on water quality improvements. We use every media opportunity we have to praise and support the work of the Portage Bay Partnership. RE Sources will continue to adhere to our mission, the science behind it, and the vision of our directors. We have faith that we will find ourselves with you on the same side of another fruitful project before long.

In solidarity for a cleaner, healthier Salish Sea, and for a strong and resilient community.

Sincerely,

Charlie Maliszewski, Board President

on behalf of:

Rodd Pemble, Board Vice President

Darcy Carlson, Board Treasurer

Blanche Bybee, Board Secretary

Jill Clark, Board Member

Andy Clay, Board Member

Jan Dank, Board Member

Rick Dubrow, Board Member

Joe Hougen, Board Member

Candice Wilson, Board Member

Amy Mower, Board Emeritus Member

CC: Crina Hoyer, Executive Director

Janet Marino, Program Director