

*For Immediate Release
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Wisconsin Agriculture Coalition Identifies Weaknesses in the Final Report of the Northeast Wisconsin Karst Task Force, Proposed Alterations

In an August 7, 2008 letter to DNR Secretary Matthew Frank and DATCP Secretary Rodney Nilsestuen, the Wisconsin Agriculture Coalition identified weaknesses in the Northeast Wisconsin Karst Task Force Report and proposed ways to fix the problems.

Inadequate identification of sources that impact water quality and overstatement of soil risks were two areas that concerned the Agriculture Coalition after the University of Wisconsin Discovery Farms Program issued its review of the Karst Report.

The focus of the Northeast Wisconsin Karst Task Force Report, completed in February 2007, was limited to livestock agriculture's contribution to water quality issues in Karst topography. UW Discovery Farms' review indicated that this approach was too limiting and failed to take into account water quality impacts caused by a variety of other contributing sources. The report overstates the risk presented, and the Agriculture Coalition is concerned that the Karst Report will be referenced as a peer-reviewed technical guide when revising statewide agriculture regulations.

"All land activities are important to take into consideration. Efforts to reduce groundwater degradation must take into account a range of issues and include strategies for dealing with all of them. All sources of nutrient impact to groundwater need to be evaluated so that we can effectively protect and improve Wisconsin's environment," said Laurie Fischer, executive director of the Dairy Business Association.

The Agriculture Coalition's letter supported developing a broader study of carbonate bedrock areas throughout Wisconsin and recommendations regarding well construction, maintenance and testing. Other suggestions were to expand research and training efforts to include land managers, agency staff and service providers, as well as establishing a soil mapping pilot program through UW Discovery Farms using Calumet County as a starting point. The goal of the mapping program would be to reduce the risk of surface and groundwater contamination by studying soil depth and nutrient application.

Members of the Agriculture Coalition who signed the letter are as follows:

Wisconsin Pork Association
Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives
Wisconsin Agri-Service Association
Midwest Food Processors Association, Inc.
Wisconsin Agribusiness Council

Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association
Wisconsin Crop Production Association
Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association
Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin
Dairy Business Association.