

October 6, 2021

Dan Puccetti, Acting SED  
Farm Services Agency Illinois State Office  
US Department of Agriculture  
3500 Wabash Ave.  
Springfield, IL 62711

Subject: Fanter Farms Environmental Assessment and promised opportunity to comment on Environmental Assessment prior to FONSI determination.

Dear Mr. Puccetti:

I am writing to you on behalf of the community located near the proposed location of the Fanter Farms hog facility in Mason County, Illinois. As a community, we are deeply invested in preserving our public health, environment, and protection of our only source of water, the Mahomet sole source aquifer. Recently we obtained over two hundred signatures on a petition regarding the inappropriate siting of a hog CAFO in our area.

The purpose of this letter is to request that the FSA Illinois State Office honor their assurances to the local community that we would have an opportunity to review the complete Environmental Assessment prior to any final decision made on the financing of the proposed Fanter Farms hog facility in Mason County near Peterville.

On Friday, October 1, 2021, we learned that the FSA had announced a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) along with a completed Environmental Assessment. This announcement shocked the community that has been working with John Gehrke and the FSA offices these past few months because we were assured by Mr. Gehrke that we would have an opportunity to submit comments on the EPA review before the FSA made their final determination.

During the original public notice, the FSA had provided us with a draft and incomplete Environmental Assessment for our review and public comment. Our community members submitted numerous and substantial comments on the items in the assessment that were available for review. The item regarding impacts to the Mahomet sole source aquifer was blank because Mr. Gehrke was waiting for a response from the USEPA. We were assured by Mr. Gehrke that the public comment period would be left open until the response was received and incorporated into the Environmental Assessment. We have been waiting for weeks to hear from Mr. Gehrke and have called his office numerous times without response.

See Attachments 1 through 6 at the end of this letter where I have collected various email communications between Mr. Gehrke and either myself or Karen Hudson that

illustrate the promise that the public comment period would remain open until the EPA report was received and the community had the opportunity to submit public comments on that portion of the Environmental Assessment.

During that time from June to September, our community continued to submit vital information to Mr. Gehrke about the threatened habitat of the Chorus Frog. I have spent a significant amount of time working with state agency experts on endangered species to set up a field inspection in the vicinity of the proposed hog farm so that the FSA would have current and vital information to address in their Environmental Assessment. Mr. Gehrke is well aware of my considerable efforts on behalf of the Chorus Frog and my pleading to wait for the state to do their field inspection.

Today (October 6, 2021) we find ourselves cut out of the promised opportunity to submit public comments on the complete Environmental Assessment. Even more troubling is the discrepancy between the dates on the FONSI and Environmental Assessment and the time period in which we were waiting on Mr. Gehrke to signal he had received the EPA review of the Mahomet sole source aquifer.

1. FONSI is dated September 16, 2021 - see page 4 of 4
2. EA cover page is dated September 16, 2021 - see page 1 of 279
3. email claiming the process is not completed yet --- Wed September 22, 2021 process not complete because public notice is needed.
4. no public notice has occurred in the Mason Democrat.

We respectfully request that the FSA deliver on their promise to our community to allow for public comment on the completed Environmental Assessment and that the FSA will give careful consideration to those public comments before finalizing their FONSI and providing Fanter Farms with financing.

To that end, we would like two weeks to evaluate the Environmental Assessment and submit formal public comments to the FSA. Thank you for your consideration in these important matters of public transparency in the federal financing of Fanter Farms.

Sincerely,

Hugh McHenry

cc: Governor of Illinois J. B. Pritzker  
US Senator Tammy Duckworth  
US Senator Dick Durban

Mr. Jerry Costello, Illinois Department of Agriculture  
Ms. J. Blumen, Sierra Club of Illinois  
Ms. Wendy Martin, Mason County Democrat

## **Attachment 1 – June 24, 2021 email from John Gehrke**

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL** <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
Date: Thu, Jun 24, 2021 at 1:52 PM  
Subject: RE: [External Email]Hi John from Karen Hudson  
To: Karen Hudson <[karenh@sraproject.org](mailto:karenh@sraproject.org)>

I have attached the DRAFT Environmental Assessment. We previously sent you the attachments to the document and then followed up with the FSA Environmental Quality Handbook.

We continue to consult with the US EPA regarding the sole source aquifer / water quality issue. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the draft assessment. Please remember that the consultation process is ongoing and the loan has not been approved. Thank you.

### **John W. Gehrke**

Farm Loan Chief  
Illinois Farm Service Agency, USDA  
[3500 Wabash Ave.](#)  
Springfield, IL [62711-8287](tel:62711-8287)  
**Phone (217) 331-6873**  
FAX (855) 800 1760

## **Attachment 2 – June 30, 2021 email from John Gehrke**

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL** <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
Date: Wed, Jun 30, 2021 at 11:37 AM  
Subject: RE: [External Email]Message from Karen Hudson  
To: Karen Hudson <[karenh@sraproject.org](mailto:karenh@sraproject.org)>

Karen,  
I have attached the contact information for the tribes.

Our consultation with the US EPA is ongoing. No conclusions have been drawn or mitigation requirements decided.

Thank you and please let me know if additional information is needed.

John Gehrke  
217 331-6873

**Attachment 3 – July 1, 2021 email thread with John Gehrke about keeping public comment period open because EPA report not received.**

**From:** Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
**Date:** Fri, Jul 2, 2021 at 12:40 PM  
**Subject:** Request  
**To:** Karen Hudson <[karenh@sraproject.org](mailto:karenh@sraproject.org)>

Karen,

Here is the written responses I received to date, with the exception of Hugh McHarry. I believe you have the same information from him that I do. The “summary” was cut and pasted directly from the emails and is all inclusive, minus their email information i.e. no edits.

The comment period remains open.

John Gehrke  
217 331-6873

**From:** Karen Hudson <[karenh@sraproject.org](mailto:karenh@sraproject.org)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 1, 2021 2:35 PM  
**To:** Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
**Subject:** Re: [External Email]Request

All we have is what you sent the other day  
Thx K

On Thu, Jul 1, 2021 at 3:32 PM Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)> wrote:  
Karen,

We acknowledge your request and I will respond.

I wasn't ignoring your request for a link to public comments. I simply did not know if you wanted me to summarize them and send to you. It appears you have access to them already, which is fine.

John Gehrke  
217 331-6873

**From:** Karen Hudson <[karenh@sraproject.org](mailto:karenh@sraproject.org)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 1, 2021 2:17 PM  
**To:** Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
**Subject:** [External Email]Request

Dear John,

I am requesting an extension of public comment period to at least a week after we see a complete assessment on the sole source aquifer by the FSA. That section of the assessment is still incomplete.

Please advise.

Thank you,  
Karen Hudson  
[Karenh@sraproject.org](mailto:Karenh@sraproject.org)

**Attachment 4 – August 5, 2021 email from John Gehrke**

From: **Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL** <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
Date: Thu, Aug 5, 2021 at 8:41 AM  
Subject: RE: [External Email]Re: Illegally sited proposed Fanter CAFO, Peterville/Kilbourne, Illinois  
To: Karen Hudson <[karenh@sraproject.org](mailto:karenh@sraproject.org)>

Good morning,

In response to your voice mail, I have not received a final report from the EPA. We are expecting it soon.

Thank you.  
John Gehrke  
217 331-6873

**Attachment 5 – September 22, 2021 email from John Gehrke**

From: "Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL" <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
To: "mcharryh@netzero.net" <[mcharryh@netzero.net](mailto:mcharryh@netzero.net)>  
Subject: Environmental Review  
Date: Wed, 22 Sep 2021 17:54:12 +0000

Mr. McHarry,

There remains one step in the environmental review process. We have determined that public notice of the final environmental assessment should be provided so that ALL interested parties have access to the same information. We anticipate public notice in your local paper next week.

Contrary to your allegations made to my supervisor as far back as June, the Fanter loan application has NOT been approved.

John W. Gehrke  
Farm Loan Chief  
Illinois Farm Service Agency, USDA  
3500 Wabash Ave.  
Springfield, IL 62711-8287  
Phone (217) 331-6873  
FAX (855) 800 1760

**Attachment 6 – October 1, 2021 email from John Gehrke**

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL** <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>  
Date: Fri, Oct 1, 2021 at 3:54 PM  
Subject: Notice of Availability (NOA)  
To: Gehrke, John - FSA, Springfield, IL <[john.gehrke@usda.gov](mailto:john.gehrke@usda.gov)>

The Farm Service Agency, USDA has completed the Environmental Assessment (EA) and issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Fanter Farm facility. We had intended for the Notice of Availability (NOA) to be published in the local paper, but that did not happen this week. Therefore, we are sending individual notices with the NOA attached. We still intend to have the Notice published.

The EA and the FONSI can be viewed and downloaded at  
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Illinois/resources/index>

**John W. Gehrke**  
Farm Loan Chief  
Illinois Farm Service Agency, USDA  
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