Shifting the balance to healthy, local food

Agriculture dominated by polluting factory farms

Farming should help the environment, not hurt it. Yet large-scale, industrial farms that cause a host of problems for our water, air and quality of life, dominate agriculture today.

Highly specialized mega-farms’ use of chemical fertilizers, pathogens from antibiotics, pesticides and other harmful practices have polluted more than 100,000 miles of rivers and streams across the country.

Factory farms also contribute to global warming and air pollution because of their intensive energy use and because they regularly truck food great distances. Emissions resulting from fertilizer use and animal production alone constitute 7 percent of total greenhouse gas pollution in the U.S.

100 organic farms and 200 markets

While North Carolina is home to more than 150 organic farms and 200 farmers markets, the vast majority of our food still comes from outside the state from polluting mega-farms. N.C. State University researchers estimate that less than 1 percent of the food sold in our supermarkets is grown in the Tar Heel state.

This summer, as Congress debates a new version of the Farm Bill, Environment North Carolina is calling for a shift in support to local, sustainable farms. The Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act would incentivize sustainable farms and help create networks to allow those farms to supply more North Carolina schools, restaurants and stores. Congressmen David Price and Mike McIntyre have already sponsored the legislation, and we are urging the rest of the state's congressional delegation to follow suit.

Last summer, the U.S. Senate passed their version of the Farm Bill, including amendments supported by Environment North Carolina to fund Farm-to-School programs and offer organic crop insurance. However, the U.S. House of Representatives never took up the legislation. A stopgap Farm Bill approved as part of the fiscal cliff deal in January will expire in September of this year, providing lawmakers another chance to promote sustainable farms.

“Too much of agriculture today is dominated by polluting factory farms,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, director. “But it doesn’t have to be this way, especially here in North Carolina.”

For more information on our campaign to support sustainable farms, visit www.EnvironmentNorthCarolina or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ EnvironmentNorthCarolina.

Farm in Lee County

Farmers market in Willow Springs
There’s no doubt that the environment has taken a beating from policy makers in Raleigh as of late. From massive cuts to our land protection programs, to the constant cry of “drill, baby, drill,” too many in our state capitol appear intent on undoing protections for our air, water and open spaces, and stalling our progress towards a clean energy future.

That’s why your continued membership is so critical. It’s that time of year again—the time when one of our staff members in our trademark blue t-shirt will knock on your door to tell you about our work to protect the state’s environment. I hope you’ll continue to support the work that we do. Now, more than ever, we need you and thousands of people like you to join us in standing up for the places we love and the values we share. After all, against sometimes-incredible odds, your membership is allowing us to make progress.

Thank you for being with us,

Elizabeth Ouzts
Director

Legislature could snatch away solar victory

Solar power is clean, virtually pollution-free, locally generated, inexhaustible and a proven jobs-creator. And it’s a growing part of North Carolina’s energy mix and economy, thanks to smart policies that we helped put in place in recent years.

Propelled by these policies, North Carolina ranked fifth in the nation for installed solar projects in 2012 and is on track to be fourth in 2013, according to the Solar Energy Industry Association.

Yet no good deed goes unpunished in the current North Carolina Legislature. A House committee narrowly approved Rep. Mike Hager’s bill to undo the state’s clean energy standard. A separate Senate measure would dismantle our clean energy tax incentives.

“We’re at a tipping point, where North Carolina can become a major leader in solar power,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, Environment North Carolina’s state director. “Yet these lawmakers seem ready to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. We’ve come too far to turn back now.”

Lawmakers dismantle environmental commissions

Developers, polluters, and other special interests would be allowed to write the environmental rules that are supposed to keep them in check, according to a measure that passed the Senate earlier this year along party lines.

“This bill lets the foxes guard the hen house,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, state director.

The measure, sponsored by Sen. Bill Rabon would fire all members of several key environmental and energy commissions, and allow a majority of the newly appointed members to represent developers, polluters, and other special interests.

The House version of the bill, adopted in March, would restore requirements that a majority of commissioners not represent the industries they are supposed to regulate. As of press time, the two versions had not been reconciled.
Out-of-state oil and gas companies have already bought upwards of 9,000 acres to drill in Chatham, Moore and Lee counties, and the General Assembly has created a polluter-friendly commission to pave the way for the controversial drilling practice—as early as 2014—over the objections of thousands of North Carolinians and local elected officials.

“We refuse to let the drinking water that serves 400,000 to become tainted—and we have a plan to convince state leaders to maintain North Carolina’s moratorium on fracking.

The process has contaminated water supplies and increased air pollution around the country. A study from North Carolina’s environmental protection agency estimated that the drinking water for hundreds of thousands could be at risk. Consider the legacy of devastation and pollution this act has left in other states:

- 320 leaks or spills where fracking fluid reached groundwater in Colorado.
- 421 drilling waste pits have leaked into groundwater in New Mexico.
- 3,355 state environmental law violations by drilling companies in Pennsylvania from 2008-2011.

Approximately 1.3 billion gallons of fracking wastewater was created in Pennsylvania in about three years.
The N.C. Senate passed a bill this winter to lift the state’s moratorium on fracking, the controversial form of natural gas drilling, beginning March 2015. As of press time, the measure, which contains a laundry list of incentives for oil and gas companies, was stalled in the House, due in part to our continued urging that this practice is dangerous and should not be allowed in our state.

The bill allows the underground injection of wastewater, which has been linked to earthquakes in other states. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources recommended against the practice last spring, citing North Carolina’s unique geology.

“This bill is a desperate giveaway to big energy companies at the expense of our water,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, director of Environment North Carolina. “It threatens Jordan Lake, the Eno River, and the drinking water for more than 400,000 North Carolinians. We applaud the House leadership for slowing this terrible idea.”