

PRESS RELEASE

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Interview with State Representative Jim Hoops

State Representative Jim Hoops (R-Napoleon) met Friday with leaders of the Williams County Alliance to discuss the group's concerns about a proposed chicken mega-factory in the area.

Alliance members expressed frustration that, as a result of legislation passed by the state assembly in 2000 and 2003, local governments have no control over the siting of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), and that the requirements an applicant must meet are limited. Proximity to homes, businesses, or even municipalities, for instance, are not considered in the permitting process, beyond minimal setback requirements.

Representative Hoops (as well as Representative Steve Buehrer and Senator Lynn Wachtmann) voted for the legislation that shifted permitting authority away from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and local health departments to the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA). Representative Hoops defended his votes, explaining that he had felt that the ODA could do a better job of overseeing things than the Ohio EPA.

When asked if he would support Senate Bill 230, a bill under consideration at the state legislature that would place a moratorium on the approval of any new CAFO permits until new guidelines are put in place, Representative Hoops said he needed to look more closely at the bill, but felt philosophically opposed to it. "I just hate to see more regulations," he explained.

He acknowledged that agriculture is changing, and said that the time may be coming when regulation of them must change as well. Asked if he believes that the current regulations adequately protect local interests, he responded, "I struggle with that."

In general, he explained, he does not support additional regulation, yet he understands the concerns that people have when a CAFO comes to their community. "Someone once asked me how I would feel about one of these [CAFOs] being built next to my mother's house – I still remember that question, and I still struggle with the issue," he said.

Representative Hoops appeared interested in maps and information that showed the importance of the area aquifer. As Lou Pendleton explained,

“We’re sitting on the best water in the State of Ohio” – and if it becomes unusable, the cost of an alternative source of water for residents in Williams County will become unaffordable.”

The aquifer, formed 14,000 years ago, is the county’s only source of drinking water, and as a sand and gravel aquifer, it is vulnerable to contamination. “You don’t build a dump or huge manure lagoons on top of your best water supply,” Pendleton said. “This resource deserves protection.”

Representative Hoops agreed to attend a public meeting in Edon on Tuesday, April 11 at 7:30 pm. – one of several meetings that the Alliance is sponsoring around the county to share information about Fremont Farms’ 5.2 million laying hen facility in Malcom, Iowa.

“We appreciated Representative Hoops taking the time to meet with us,” said WCA spokesperson Sherry Fleming. “Although there were certainly areas of disagreement, we hope he will step forward to help protect our local communities.”

Representative Hoops, who currently holds a seat in the state House of Representatives for District 75, is running for the Republican nomination for District 1 in the state Senate, a position currently held by Senator Wachtmann. Steve Buehrer, who currently represents District 74 in the state House, is also running for the Republican nomination for the District 1 Senate seat. Meanwhile, Senator Wachtmann is running for Jim Hoops’ House seat in District 75. (If all of this is too confusing, you have term limits to thank.)

The Williams County Alliance plans to schedule meetings with Representative Buehrer and Senator Wachtmann in the coming days. As one WCA member put it, “The people who want to represent the Williams County at the state legislature need to hear from us about this chicken factory proposal – and we need to hear from them!”