

Testimony provided to the legislative Subcommittee on Water Policy 111423. I ceded my time back to the Chair in order for him to navigate the agenda with remaining time and a 10:30 adjournment. Please consider the remarks below I intended to speak today.

Thank you chair and members for allowing me to speak briefly again today, I'm Lori Cox and I own Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC in Carver County. During your Oct 3rd meeting I testified in support of the EPA petition and today included for members graphics and data to better illustrate agriculture-impaired waters. The data is from MDA, DNR, MPCA and EPA. I'll only refer to them in the interest of time.

All human interference on soils lead to positive (improving) or negative (degrading) water quality. Outcomes from perennial tillage, application of liquid/powder/granulated ag chemicals (=pesticides/herbicides/fungicides), various forms of synthetic nitrogen, overburden of manure on land are considered pollutants regardless of agency or report one reads or cites. Continual rotation of inputs, tillage, drainage, lax permitting, no regulations, limited crop diversity results in poor surface water and groundwater. Both are drinking water sources in MN.

I'll state again; every choice in farming is just that, a choice. Agribusiness tells producers what to do and buy to keep their balance sheets and profits happy. A producer can't reject environmental outcomes and blame it on everyone else as if they're a victim of it. Agronomy has turned into salespeople defined by the products they sell, not motivated to sell less products to any producer. It is a circular system. Farmers have always had choices in what and how they implement and how much they spend. We have more technical and farmer-to-farmer support as decades go by to the tune of billions of dollars annually. We don't yet have enough producers using water quality as a metric and outcome of their operation. We've been hearing the same rejection of real, environmental data for the last 50 years. When we regulated systems and industries, we saw almost immediate, real improvements just as testifiers outlines in the discussion of cleaner water through regulation and rules around sewage. Those industries are still in business today, and change with the times as expected.

During the last Subcommittee meeting we heard Mr. Formo speak on behalf of producers who remained anonymous for 'obvious reasons'. No mention of what those reasons were so it was summarily hard to tell if the stories were real. Any farmer practicing stewardship can describe their practices and matching positive outcomes through data, just as I have. We heard about conservation practices, but not concerns for their, or their neighbors water.

I did not understand from Representative Jacob he wanted to address me in his Oct 18th emailed district update. I'm unsure what an attempt to denigrate a testifying citizen of my gender does to improve water issues within his district, for MN water policy, or his standing on this Subcommittee. The USDA and IRS know I'm a farmer too. His message does not address actions his district is taking to ensure reduction of ag pollution sources. My area of Carver County's water infiltration rate is hours to weeks, just like his. Not months to years. But his isn't an unfamiliar response. There is an immediate need to reverse unchecked damage and the threat to family farms he speaks of are the current, real water threats households and businesses are dealing with. Rep Jacob also previously stated a litany of ag conservation programs offered for decades, all are voluntary. Many programs have no way of addressing inputs leaching into soils, or downstream effects of unregulated ag drainage perennially. Conservation does not equal reduction or removal of all pollutants unless it *specifically* calls them out, can be measured, or the producer stops using them altogether by integrating alternative practices. We cannot incentivize or buy our way out of making voluntary the winning choice. We've tried, and failed.

Generations of producers before us did not degrade natural resources or themselves so why would anyone put down their ancestors. Lack of accountability from ag point and non-point pollution sources does not mean all taxpayers should not be on the hook, but those accountable should. The EPA discusses the same in their response letter to MDA and MPCA.

Thank you again Mr. Chair, and members of the Subcommittee.