

Toxic Taters Coalition
P.O. Box 25
Callaway, MN 56521

4-26-16

Dear Members of the Legislative Water Commission,

I present these comments to you on behalf of the Toxic Taters Coalition, a grassroots citizens' organization comprised of Native and non-Native rural Minnesotans who live around RD Offutt's (RDO's) potato fields and have experienced the impacts of industrial potato farming first hand. Members of the coalition had hoped to speak to you directly and were deeply disappointed to learn that the government that represents them would not allow an opportunity for them to speak for themselves and bring forth concerns regarding a serious issue that affects them directly.

Toxic Taters is respectfully requesting that the Legislative Water Commission recommend that Pineland Sands Land and Water Study not receive public funding. We are making this request for the following reasons.

1. Citizens have voiced strong opposition to the study, calling instead for the state to use existing public environmental assessment tools to assess the impact of RDO's projects. More than 400 people signed a petition for an environmental assessment worksheet (EAW); more than a dozen allied organizations submitted letters of concern and support for existing public environmental assessment to the legislature, Commissioner Landwehr, and Governor Dayton; and many Minnesotans have called and emailed these entities with the same message.
2. Communities in north central Minnesota have faced contamination of their air and water from irrigated, chemical-intensive agriculture for decades. Studies of environmental and human health effects should be conducted on these areas where irrigated agriculture is already dominant and should explore how more sustainable farming methods can positively impact the environment and health. Until improvements can be made in these areas, this type of agriculture should not expand into more parts of the state.
3. Funding is already allocated to state agencies for public environmental review processes including the environmental assessment. When a more in-depth process like an environmental impact statement is called for, the costs are covered in large part by industry. The public should not be responsible for funding a special study that has been shaped by a major industry player, outside of the environmental review process.
4. The role of the DNR is to regulate. The Memorandum of Understanding between RDO and DNR -- specifically the Pineland Sands Land and Water Study -- forms a partnership between the two entities. This partnership endangers DNR's regulatory role by giving RDO power in determining the design and implementation of a study that is being used to ease the permitting process.

Many of the people living in the rural areas of north central Minnesota around the potato fields have been negatively and permanently impacted by corporate agribusiness. Toxic Taters was founded because people were getting sick, losing livestock and their livelihoods, and being forced to move because they couldn't continue to live with the chemical usage next door. These issues continue in our communities. Some our members have to buy their water. Others are dealing with a host of diseases. There are far too many stories of grief and loss.

The Pineland Sands Land and Water Study opens the door to a major expansion of where those chemicals will be used. More people's lives and livelihoods will be put in danger just as ours have been. More small farmers will lose crops and animals. More homeowners will no longer be able to drink the water from their wells. Some will get sick and some will die. We cannot stand by to watch this happen in our state. We hope that you will not either. RDO must clean up its act where it is at before it is allowed to expand its farming operations.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.

Sincerely,



Amy S. Mondloch
Toxic Taters, Coordinator