

SB 2174 Testimony in Opposition 3/7/25
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My husband grew up in Nebraska. Twenty-six years ago he convinced me to drop my career and move our young family across the country to a home in the middle of cornfields. I was reluctant, but I soon came to love living here.

We returned to Nebraska to raise our children in a healthy and safe rural environment. These values have been eroded by the invasion of industrial meat production operations known as CAFOs moving into our rural neighborhood. The CAFO that moved in just 3.5 miles from our home six years ago houses nearly 4 million chickens per year. When their manure and dead birds are spread on the field across from our property, I cannot go outside my home for days because the stench burns my eyes and throat. Complaints go unheeded because there is not enough manpower for enforcement of the few regulations we have.

When I see manure and dead birds spread on top of fields near my home, I wonder how much of that material contains an undetected infection like bird flu. That infection can easily spread to my animals, the wild animals that visit our property, and to neighbors in my community. Nebraska has already had to depopulate several CAFOs due to bird flu.

Local economic interests depend on aggressive infection outbreak containment. These economic interests include rural livestock owners, as well as hunters and bird watchers who make up a large portion of our tourism industry. The Platte River Valley where I live is eighth in the nation for bird watching¹ and upland bird hunting attracts 20,000 nonresidents to the state annually². Tourism is considered Nebraska's third largest industry³, accounting for \$4.6

¹ Country Living Magazine, April 2024 issue. <https://www.countryliving.com/life/travel/g60277934/places-to-bird-watch-america-guide/>

² Bryan O'Connor, Upland Game Program Manager, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. 90,000-137,000 total upland bird hunters annually.

³ UNL Extension publication G1858 <https://extensionpubs.unl.edu/publication/g1858/2008/html/view>

billion in revenue in 2023⁴. Yet we are endangering all of this with CAFOs that are natural incubators for diseases like bird and swine flu.

When we moved to Nebraska in 2000, our well water was clean and safe to drink. We have seen the nitrate levels rise steadily over the years, and have had to install a reverse-osmosis system to make it safe to drink. This system cost us approximately \$575 to install and \$108 annually to maintain with replacement filters⁵. High nitrate levels are associated with proximity to animal feeding operations and are correlated to cancer outbreaks.

Because of this, my husband, a born and raised Nebraska farm boy, now wants to move out of state. We don't want to be trapped living on property while its value is steadily diminished by industrial facilities moving in next door.⁶

Many of Nebraska's farmers who could not get loans to build the 1540 CAFOs in our state had to turn to out-of-state investment companies who own and operate the facilities. The farmers get a land lease agreement in return for a requirement to buy livestock feed of a type and at a price controlled by the slaughterhouse. Farmers assume all liability and maintenance of buildings that are not even theirs until the barns have become fully depreciated, outdated and in need of repair at their own expense in order to continue being contracted to the slaughterhouse. Moreover, people outside the state are brought in to run the CAFO; they are not local workers. I understand the worker turnover rate is 35% and with the bird flu outbreak that has now spread to hogs, cattle, and humans, it could go higher.

Local control is very important to rural residents. I'm a big fan of local control, having served elected positions on my district's school board and on a regional Natural Resources

⁴ Travel and Tour World, Nov 2024 issue. <https://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/nebraska-tourism-soars-to-new-heights-with-4-6-billion-spending-and-record-breaking-12-6-million-overnight-visitors/>

⁵ Amazon purchase price for Ice Springs model. 3-4 filters/year at a cost of \$216 for 2-year set.

⁶ "property values near CAFOs may be reduced by up to 40% depending on distance, wind direction and other factors. The diminution in property values is due to CAFO odors, flies and a negative impact on the quality of life for nearby residents." Lawrence Daniels, Professional Geologist. <https://vertexeng.com/insights/the-environmental-impacts-of-concentrated-animal-feeding-operations-cafos/>

District here in Nebraska. As those of you who serve in government know, these bodies understand their geographies and constituents best. Local authorities are beholden to local residents who count on them to preserve the livability of an area.

Without local control and local accountability, state citizens' power disappears. Moving into its place will most certainly be outside entities that do not have the best interests of your state in mind. Rural states should not make themselves irresistibly attractive to out-of-state and foreign interests who wish to invest in nuisance industrial operations that are located as far as possible from their *own* homes and shores. Legislators should consider doing a thorough independent cost-benefit analysis before sacrificing a state's natural resources to any development, and particularly CAFOs. Yet here we Nebraskans are, with contaminated water, horrific odors, increased disease risk for both animals and humans, exploitation of our land and water by out-of-state interests, and decreasing property values. All because we thought CAFOs just *sounded* like a good idea for our economy.

Trust me, your state does not want to be like Nebraska in this way. Don't make setbacks friendlier for CAFOs to locate next to your neighbors, who have a preexisting right to enjoy their rural homes and property values.