

# Editorial

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## The News & Observer

*'The Old Reliable'*  
A MAJORITY NEWSPAPER

"I advise and enjoin those who direct the paper in the tomorrows never to advocate any cause for personal profit or preferment. I would wish it always to be 'the tocsin' and to devote itself to the policies of equality and justice to the underprivileged. If the paper should at anytime be the voice of self-interest or become the spokesman of privilege or selfishness it would be untrue to its history."

FROM THE WILL OF JOSEPHUS DANIELS, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER 1894-1898

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## Hogs an economic miracle or environmental disaster?

Your recent series "High on the hog" described how the North Carolina hog industry has found a competitive niche in the world market. The Ivey brothers have helped expand N.C. pork exports by creating "silly pork" that suits the tastes of Japanese customers.

But much about hogs (as chronicled in your Pulitzer Prize-winning series, "Boss Hog" in the mid-1990s) was omitted. Namely, hogs produce a lot of waste, and how that waste is managed has a direct effect on the communities and people of Eastern North Carolina. Housing thousands of animals, a typical hog farm generates sewage waste equivalent of a small town. Gaseous pollutants and odor are released into the atmosphere, while both solid and liquid hog wastes are pumped into ponds that may be acres in size. From these lagoons, liquefied hog waste is regularly sprayed onto nearby agricultural land, much of which is close to homes, schools, churches and businesses. Even when operating as permitted, runoff contaminates surface and groundwater.

Emissions of gases and particulate matter from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations affect human and environmental health. Those who live or go to school near large hog CAFOs have higher levels of asthma and reduced immune system functions, as well as increased reports of headaches, eye irritation and nausea. Waste that enters waterways causes algal blooms that deplete oxygen, resulting in the death of fish and other marine life. When lagoons overflow, the waste can enter local waterways.

Since 1997, a moratorium on new permits for hog-waste lagoons has been in place. But virtually all the farms responsible for raising 10 million hogs in North Carolina are grandfathered and must meet only earlier standards. Allowing these farms to expand without

fixing the pollution they create would exacerbate their effects on neighbors and the environment of Eastern North Carolina.

Environmentally Superior Technologies were identified about 10 years ago through extensive scientific studies addressing hog-farm pollution. These ESTs can partially mitigate much of the human health and environmental concerns. But these systems cost more to install and operate than lagoons. Without ESTs, the full social costs of hog waste treatment are not included in the pork production business model.

North Carolinians should embrace opportunities to succeed with new ideas, but this should not come at a cost to our quality of life, health and environmental conditions. As we rise to the challenge of feeding more than 9 billion fellow citizens of the world, the ancillary effects of our food production systems will be severe and widespread unless we act. We must not forget the importance of institutions that protect environmental quality (air, water and soil), even as we may succeed in advancing the global position of our agricultural production.

The pork industry must integrate the protection of North Carolinians and our environment into any plans to meet foreign demand.

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*The length limit was waived to permit a fuller response to the series. William H. Schlesinger, dean emeritus of the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University, also contributed.*