

The Honorable Bob Perciasepe
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

To EPA Acting Administrator

We are writing as representatives of the nation's agricultural community to express our deep concern, and our members' outrage, over the recent actions of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to publicly release a significant amount of personal and business information about thousands of livestock and poultry farmers across the country. It is our understanding that this information was gathered from more than 30 state permitting authorities and simply transmitted as raw data to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Earth Justice and the Pew Charitable Trusts as part of two separate Freedom of Information Act requests.

It is our understanding that EPA released the information without undertaking a review of the data to protect against the release of private or confidential business information that may have been improperly included in the states' submissions. There appears to have been a presumption by EPA that *all* data submitted by the states was publicly and readily available and therefore afforded no protection from disclosure under any federal laws.

From the farmer's perspective, the agency has collected and released details of peoples' private lives to NRDC and the others. The data included information on livestock and poultry farms and ranches of all sizes, from large CAFOs to the smallest of farms, many of which are maintained in state databases solely under state laws. The overwhelming majority of those farms are owned and operated by *families*. These are farmers who are honorably engaged in honest work to produce livestock and poultry to support themselves, their families, their communities, our country and consumers around the world. In most instances, farmers and ranchers live and raise their children in very close proximity to their animals. We object in the strongest terms possible to the release of this data for possible use by groups who oppose our members' businesses and way of life for reasons largely, if not entirely, unrelated to the honorable goals and objectives of the Clean Water Act.

We are deeply concerned that EPA is also actively developing from this, and similarly collected data for, a comprehensive, national and public database of every livestock and poultry operation in this nation, regardless of whether the facility holds a Clean Water Act permit. We stand ready to work with EPA and other appropriate government entities on creative and serious ways to help support these farmers and ranchers in meeting the goals of the Clean Water Act. But we, as representatives of the agricultural community, cannot see in these efforts a legitimate role for such a national, comprehensive database that does not also carry serious and unacceptable risks for farmers and ranchers and their families, and we would consequently oppose any such effort by EPA.

The specific reasons for our opposition are detailed in the lengthy comments we submitted to EPA and OIRA in 2011 opposing EPA's proposed Section 308 rule. In those comments we

expressed our concerns regarding the privacy and security implications of EPA's collection and release of individual farmer information. We went to great lengths to explain our concerns and justify the need to handle this type of information with the greatest of care. We emphasized that the information EPA sought to collect was not merely a business address, but a vital link in the nations' food systems, so vital in fact, that the Department of Homeland Security considers livestock critical infrastructure an important national resource. We also pointed out that many locations were also the address of a family's home. Yet, despite our very public efforts to sensitize EPA, agency staff made the unilateral decision that these concerns were not credible.

Going forward, it is critical that EPA reconsider the depth and seriousness of rural America's concerns and act responsibly to avoid any further release of sensitive information that could cause harm, not only to individual farmers and ranchers but to the nations' food supply.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Chicken Council
National Pork Producers Council
National Turkey Federation
United Egg Producers
US Poultry and Egg Association

CC:

Rep. Frank Lucas
Rep. Collin Peterson
Rep. Bill Shuster
Rep. Nick Rahall
Rep. Bob Gibbs
Rep. Timothy Bishop
Sen. Debbie Stabenow
Sen. Thad Cochran
Sen. Barbara Boxer
Sen. David Vitter
Sen. Benjamin Cardin
Sen. John Boozman