

NEWS | AUGUST 4, 2022

We're challenging the NC permit for hog waste operations causing pollution and harm to communities



With about two million hogs, the highest number of hogs in the United States, Duplin County in North Carolina is inundated with industrial hog operations and pollution from their waste pits and spraying of hog feces and urine onto fields. (©Cornell Watson)

On behalf of the Environmental Justice Community Action Network and Cape Fear River Watch, we challenged a one-size-fits all permit

issued by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality that would [allow hog operations to use giant pits of untreated hog feces and urine to produce methane gas](#) while spraying the harmful waste on surrounding fields.

This outdated practice continues a long history of water and air pollution and harm to the families – disproportionately Black, Latino, and Native American people – living nearby.

In the summer of 2021, despite strong opposition from impacted community groups, the N.C. General Assembly passed and Governor Cooper signed into law the

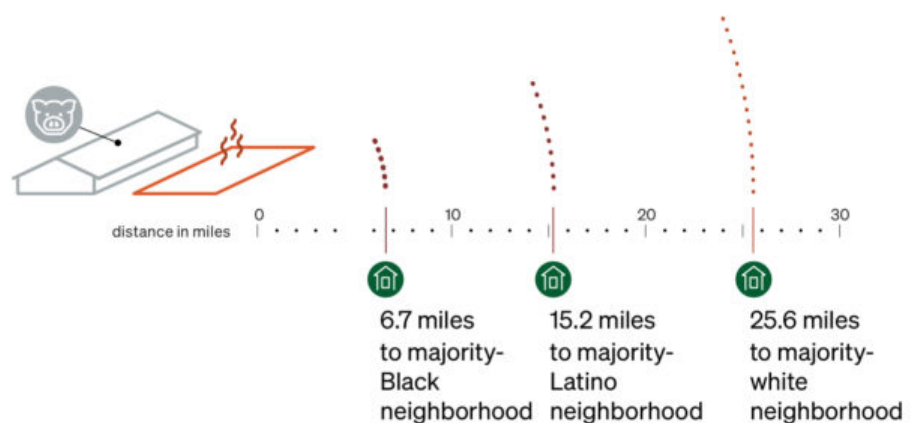
[2021 Farm Act](#),

which charged DEQ with developing a fast-tracked, one-size-fits all permit – or general permit – for swine waste-to-energy projects. [DEQ issued the final general permit](#) on June 30, 2022.

“This general permit continues a long legacy of injustice by a powerful industry, entrenching pollution and harms onto people with less

The demographics of rural North Carolina neighborhoods predict how close people live to an industrial hog operation.

AVERAGE MILES TO NEAREST HOG FACILITY



The average majority-Black rural neighborhood is less than 7 miles away from an industrial hog operation, 4 times closer than the average majority-white rural neighborhood.

Source: United States Census Bureau. (2010). 2010 Decennial Census. "2010 Summary File 1 (SF1)." <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2010/dec/summary-file-1.html>.

political power despite the availability of cleaner, better solutions,” says Senior Attorney Blakely Hildebrand. “The state has a responsibility under the law to protect people from pollution.”

The general permit fails to comply with a state law requirement for cleaner technology and does not include protections against pollution for nearby families, waterways, or air quality.



EJCAN members and staff, including Sherri White-Williamson (second from right) meet with SELC staff to discuss the harms of biogas on communities.

“Frontline community members strongly opposed the Farm Act and demanded more from DEQ in issuing this permit, but these community concerns fell

on deaf ears. Instead, this permit will add to the already heavy burden that communities of color have borne for decades and continue a long-standing environmental injustice,” says Sherri White-Williamson, co-founder of the Environmental Justice Community Action Network.

In issuing the general permit, the legislature and DEQ ignored long-standing and well documented environmental justice and pollution concerns. The general permit issued by DEQ allows the use of an

outdated practice of using the waste lagoon and sprayfield system in which untreated hog waste from thousands of animals is collected in large pits and sprayed onto neighboring fields. It also increases harms and is unlikely to result in the benefits claimed by the hog industry.

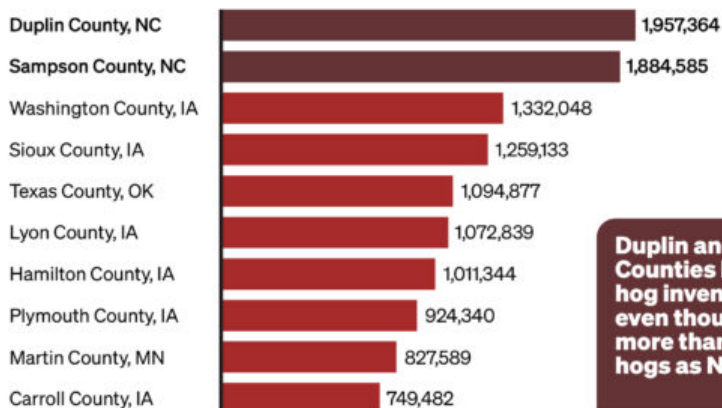
“The legislature’s passage of the Farm Act and DEQ’s issuance of this permit are just the latest in a long line of decisions

that ignore the devastating effect that the hog industry has on our environment,” says Kemp Burdette, Cape Fear Riverkeeper at Cape Fear River Watch. “Far from a solution to our climate crisis, this permit gives industry a rubber stamp to keep polluting our air and water rather than holding them accountable to the law.”

Cleaner technologies for managing billions of gallons of hog waste were developed in North Carolina and address many of these concerns but have not been widely adopted by the hog industry. The groups are asking the court to require the Department of Environmental Quality to comply with a law mandating cleaner technology to manage hog waste.

Top 10 Hog Producing Counties in the U.S.

NUMBER OF HOGS

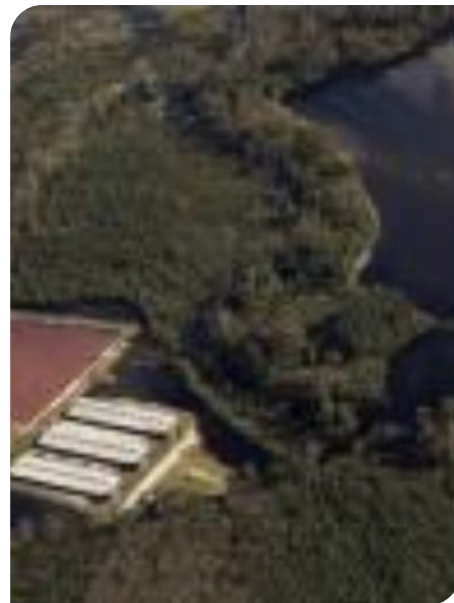


Duplin and Sampson Counties have the highest hog inventory in the U.S. even though Iowa produces more than twice as many hogs as North Carolina.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, (2019, April). 2017 Census of Agriculture - County-level data. <https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/index.php>.

Learn more about how SELC is confronting pollution from industrial animal operations.

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