

**ALMA COLLEGE / MICHIGAN ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL  
RURAL MICHIGAN INITIATIVE 2019 CONFERENCE WHITEPAPER**

***Consensus Statements:***

1. Water quality in the headwaters and main trunks of the rivers feeding the Great Lakes is at a critical level of impairment. This impairment is affecting human health, ecological health, and the economy of the state as well as the communities that depend on these waterways.
2. There is little-to-no debate in the scientific community identifying industrial agriculture as a significant cause of surface water impairment around the Great Lakes.
3. CAFO regulations are not protective of surface water quality, human health, or the environment; as CAFOs follow less stringent rules, with less oversight compared with other point source facilities identified by the Clean Water Act, such as wastewater treatment plants.
4. Failing septic systems are prevalent throughout the state. Septic systems, at present have no comprehensive, uniform, state-wide septic protection law. Risks from human-borne pathogens have been identified in nearly every waterway tested in the state.
5. Because of the influence of agricultural lobbying organizations, there is a lack of political will from the Governor's Office, the State Legislature, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to effectively and satisfactorily address water quality and health problems stemming from industrial agriculture. This has resulted in frustration from local communities and rural governing bodies due to the lack of effective state and federal support dealing with water quality and related human health issues.
6. Residents in rural communities, recreationalists, outdoor enthusiasts, sportsmen and sportswomen, as well as those who live, work, and play on the shores of the Great Lakes are angry and disturbed at the continued degradation of the environment with no effective action being taken by their state government.
7. Our water quality problems in the Great Lakes are a symptom of larger issues that have to do with our current economic model of doing business, especially in agriculture. Without change to this model the health of our environment, and the health of the people of Michigan, will continue to decline.

***Action Items:***

1. As the State Legislature has neglected on two occasions to pass meaningful legislation addressing failing septic systems, the State of Michigan, led by the Governor's Office must immediately work towards a comprehensive, state-wide septic system policy that protects our surface and ground water.
2. The Governor's Office should assign an independent, non-partisan taskforce to assess industrial agricultural impacts on the environment, health, and economy of rural communities; the result of which should lead to specific recommendations for addressing these impacts effectively.
3. A moratorium must be placed on the construction of new CAFOs in the State of Michigan and on the expansion of existing operations in watersheds identified as impaired or significantly at risk for impairment.
4. CAFOs must be regulated in accordance with their status in the Clean Water Act: as point-source discharging facilities; further, they must be required to comply with those standards for the proper treatment of waste that govern wastewater treatment facilities. The state and federal government should find ways to help farmers meet these new regulatory guidelines.