Presentation to the
Manitoba Clean Environment Commission
Manitoba Hog Industry Review
Manitoba, Manitoba, April 17, 2007

My name is MICKEY HERSAK. I
farm NE 22-18-23, just east of Oakburn,
in the R.M. of Shoal Lake. The Oak River
passes through this farm, forming a
large wetland, and combined with
the adjacent natural vegetation and
woodlot, it now a well known
nature centre of approximately 100 acres.

The river is joined by many creeks
and the marsh has become the
filter for Shoal Lake, a lake
of much improved quality because
of the work of local wildlife enthusiasts.
Waters from Shoal Lake eventually
become the Assiniboine, the Red, Lake Winnipeg, the mighty Nelson as they flow into Hudson Bay. So, from very small sources of Duck, Tofane and Toth Lakes, the tiny water molecules reach the very large oceans of the world. However, some of the water stays back, seeps into the ground to become part of the large Oshunah Aquifer, feeding our wells to supply the most essential compound for life—water.

We are truly blessed to be living on the Western Manitoba plateau and parkland, a plateau climbing from the prairie floor in dramatic fashion. It is a land that is pine-scented and lake dotted. It was
once a glacier, later the edge of a very large lake (Agassiz). Today it is a region of rolling terrain, gentle uplands and broad valleys. Here you find spruce, groves of aspens, clear spring-fed lakes, open meadows, wide fields of highly productive land, dotted with ponds and marshes. This diversity gives our region one of the richest and most varied inventories of plants and animals. Consequently, it is little wonder that our first National Park, was located immediately to the North of us. We are in the park's watershed. The prairie potholes, brimming with water and ringed with vegetation,
are defined as prairie habitat. They not only provide homes for many species of waterfowl, songbirds and game, but also provide nature's mechanism of purification. These ecosystems purify the water we drink and the air we breathe!

They perform a cycle that has lasted thousands of years. In recent times, many of the potholes have disappeared, as have the woodlots, including some on my farm. And, as they disappear or become polluted, the tools that prevent water degradation, also vanish.

My land straddles the Oak River. However, its waters are
separated politically in adjacent municipalities. As political and private property lands separate myself and my neighbours and others in Manitoba, but geographically we are not separated. Any disruption to the plant or micro organic life in this local water has wide ranging effects on others close by or far distances away.

There is much to be learned on how we have used our land in the past. The jury is still out on what damage we have done with chemical and organic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. All of the above applications involve some
form of rinsing and dissolving is almost always waste. The intent is always the same—greater production and yields and greater income. Witness our results—first—economically.

Overproduction lowers prices.

Secondly—environmentally.

Greater damage to our natural resources, but it is in my ditch or in Lake Winnipeg.

The hearing this evening is to review the sustainability of our hog production industry. You have asked to share our views.

Here are some of my observations.

I have these on:

(1) Reading reports and hearing the media

(2) Attending hearings on the industry and other agricultural endeavors.
3. travelling extensively in Canada, US, and abroad
4. attaining two bachelors and a masters degree at the University
5. farming as a 4th generation farmer and gaining wisdom from my parents and grandparents
6. working with consultants from the Crop Water Institute, University of Manitoba and Manitoba Natural Resources
7. studying the Water Stewardship Act

Observations:
1. huge increase in production with fewer producers
2. major export of numbers and dollar value
3. increase in job creation

The above three points sound very positive, at first glance. But if you read between the lines, some reservations are being expressed by others as well as myself.

These are:
1. economic diversification, which is not ecologically sound
2. short term economic gain
3. depleted water supplies and aquifers
4. Questionable working conditions for minimum wage staff

5. Higher than average bankruptcies in farming when compared to livestock such as beef or poultry and grain/pilfered production

6. Unfavourable social conditions resulting when communities and families are split trying to resolve hog production in their area

7. Minimal number of contaminating situations of wells, streams caused by the industry

8. Large cost to local municipalities in terms of infrastructure only to have abandoned projects a few years down the road

9. Failing to properly address the liquid waste problem—odour, toxicity, and nutrient value as a fertilizer

10. Contributing little to carry out research to solve problems

11. Applying outdated technology in production and marketing
12) ignoring the concerns of neighbours and citizens in general

13) having little concern for long term environmental issues

My statements are open for debate and I welcome discussion to this effect.

I leave you with two questions regarding the hog production industry

Why has the province of Manitoba ordered a moratorium on large hog barn expansion?

Why did Premier Gary Doer create a Department of Water Stewardship with a cabinet minister?

(Free Press - Nov 5, 2003, front page)

His answer was - "I want clean water, clean policy"

And so do I mine!

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