

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 6, 2021

Contact: Aidan O'Shea,
Public Justice,
aoshea@publicjustice.net

**Climate, Environmental Justice Groups Call for
Biden EPA to Hold Industrial Dairy and Hog Operations
Accountable and to Reject Big Ag Technology**

Today, environmental justice, rural community and environmental groups across the U.S. filed a petition with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, calling for the Biden EPA to regulate industrial dairy and hog operations and hold them accountable for their harmful contributions to air and climate pollution. The petition also calls on the EPA to reject the falsely driven narrative of factory farm gas branded as “biogas” by industrial agribusiness and Big Oil & Gas.

Factory farm gas is dirty energy touted by the industrial agriculture industry and its partners in the fossil fuel industry as green technology that will help reduce carbon emissions from factory farms, when in reality, it will only perpetuate the harmful impact of the factory farm system on rural communities. Instead of moving toward a clean energy alternative that will help mitigate the effects of climate change, factory farm gas will only bring more harm to communities, and continue to negatively impact Black, Latino, Indigenous, and white rural communities and further harm our land, air, and water.

This petition calls for immediate action from the EPA to exercise its authority and fulfill its obligation to protect public health, rural communities, and our land, air, and water by listing and regulating industrial dairy and hog operations—defined as facilities that confine at least 500 cows or 1,000 hogs without access to pasture while liquefying manure—under section 111 of the Clean Air Act. As major sources of the super pollutant methane, the category endangers public health and welfare and now accounts for 33 percent of agricultural methane emissions, 13 percent of total U.S. methane emissions, and 1.3 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

“Americans deserve clean air and water, a stable climate, and to live in healthy and sustainable communities,” the petitioners said. “The EPA has the duty and authority to regulate these methane super-emitters under the Clean Air Act as part of the Administration’s larger strategy to prevent catastrophic and irreversible climate change.”

This petition seeks to hold the EPA accountable and demands that the EPA step up and address the role that industrial agriculture plays as a major driver in climate change. The EPA must grant this petition, while rejecting false “solutions” offered by Big Oil & Gas in the form of pipelines carrying factory farm gas derived from manure decomposing in long-term storage tanks called anaerobic digesters that actually hurt Black, Latino, Indigenous, and white rural communities. Instead, the EPA must uphold the President’s commitment to a climate agenda that “follows the science” rather than conjecture and corporate motivation, and embraces real climate change solutions, including sustainable agricultural practices, as well as wind and solar energy in order to restore rural communities, help stabilize our climate, and advance environmental justice.

“In North Carolina, industrial hog facilities are placed in predominantly African-American, Native American, and Latino communities. We have to live with 19 million tons of crap in our backyards every year. It stinks up our air, gives our kids asthma, and adds stress to our lives. Environmental justice means listening when people say, ‘I don’t want this in my neighborhood’”, said **Naeema Muhammad, Organizing Co-Director with the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network.**

“I started taking this problem of industrial agricultural operations seriously when I saw ditches from factory farms running by schools and directly into playgrounds where children play,” said **Kim Stephens, a veteran, law student, and member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement in Story County, Iowa.** “This petition is an opportunity to raise our voices against an industry that only hurts our communities and people across the country.”

“We live in a community with sixteen industrial agriculture operations and seven digesters, and experience the effects of large-scale industrial agriculture every day,” said **Lynn Utesch, a farmer and organizer with Kewaunee Cares of Kewaunee, Wis.** “The industry is greenwashing factory farm gas and saying that it’s good for the environment, but as farmers, we know that the manure stays in our communities, in the ground, in our drinking water and in our air. We know where the real solution lies — in pasture-based farming. Let the cows out on the pasture, that’s where they want to be. In the spring when things are turning green, you can watch the cows dancing out there. We should farm by working with nature, not against it.”

“The Biden Administration has committed to advance environmental justice, follow the science, and stand with communities to help restore our climate,” said **Brent Newell, Public Justice Food Project Senior Attorney.** “We expect the Biden EPA to deliver on these promises, which starts with granting this petition, signaling that they are ready to step up, where previous administrations have fallen short, and acknowledge the science: emissions from industrial dairy and

hog operations are a tremendous contributor to climate change. A commitment to advancing environmental justice starts with this petition, and the Biden EPA cannot make good on its promise without it.”

Spokespeople are available to speak to the media on the importance of the issues in this petition through the lens of rural America. A list of community member statements can be found below. View the petition [here](#).

Petitioners:

Association of Irrigated Residents

Center for Food Safety

Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment

Dakota Rural Action

Environmental Integrity Project

Farm Forward

Food & Water Watch

Friends of Family Farmers

Friends of the Earth

Government Accountability Project

Great Lakes Environmental Law Center

GreenLatinos

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement

Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future

Land Stewardship Project

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Missouri Rural Crisis Center

North Carolina Environmental Justice Network

Northeast Organic Farming Association, Massachusetts Chapter

Organic Consumers Association

Public Justice Foundation

Sierra Club

Socially Responsible Agricultural Project

Nationwide Community Member Support for this Climate Petition:

“All three of our rivers are listed under the EPA’s impaired waters list. Infants in our community have been poisoned. We need the EPA to recognize this petition because our grandchildren can’t play outside when manure is being sprayed in the air, and we want them to enjoy our farm the way we did growing up.”

-Nancy Utesch, a farmer and organizer with Kewaunee Cares of Kewaunee, Wis.

“Industrial agriculture oppresses communities of color. We stand in solidarity with the mostly Black North Carolina communities and mostly Latino California communities who are fighting against factory farms in their backyards, too. We stand in solidarity with the meatpacking workers, who are mostly people of color and are being exploited by the industrial ag system.”

-Kim Stephens, a veteran, law student, and member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement in Story County, Iowa.

“This problem starts in our rural backyards, but affects people across the country and beyond. This is about caring for our communities, being a good neighbor, and reminding our elected representatives that their job is to work for us.”

-Barb Kalbach, a fourth-generation family farmer, nurse, and member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement from Adair County, Iowa.

“Public money should be used for the public good. But when taxpayer dollars fund factory farm gas infrastructure and pipelines, our government is taking money out of communities to keep an industrial agriculture system in place that hurts them. This system depends on our public dollars, but gives nothing in return.”

-Edith Haenel, a retired clinical social worker and member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement in Worth County, Iowa.

“We have already seen how Biden has issued several executive orders that promise to make real climate progress, and now we need them to recognize the impact of factory farm emissions and act accordingly.”

- Lynn Utesch, a farmer and organizer with Kewaunee Cares of Kewaunee, Wisconsin.