Agriculture dominated by polluting factory farms

Farming should help the environment, not hurt it. Yet large-scale, industrial farms that cause a host of problems for our water, air, and quality of life, dominate agriculture.

Highly specialized mega-farms’ use of chemical fertilizers, pathogens from antibiotics, pesticides, and other harmful practices have polluted more than 100,000 miles of rivers and streams across the country, causing “dead zones” in the Chesapeake Bay and fish kills in our rivers.

Factory farms also contribute to global warming and air pollution because of their intensive energy use and because they regularly truck food great distances. Emissions resulting from fertilizer use and animal production alone constitute 7 percent of total greenhouse gas pollution in the U.S.

100 organic farms and markets
While Virginia is home to more than 100 organic farms and farmers markets, the vast majority of food sold and consumed in the commonwealth still comes from outside the state from polluting mega-farms.

This summer however, as Congress debates a new version of the Farm Bill, Environment Virginia is calling for a shift in support to local, sustainable farms. The Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act would incentivize sustainable farms and help create networks to allow those farms to supply more Virginia schools, restaurants and stores. Congressman Jim Moran has signed on as an original cosponsor of the legislation, and we are urging the rest of the state’s congressional delegation to follow suit.

Last summer, the U.S. Senate passed their version of the Farm Bill, including amendments supported by Environment Virginia to fund Farm-to-School programs and offer organic crop insurance. The U.S. House of Representatives, however, never took up the legislation.

A stopgap Farm Bill approved as part of the fiscal cliff deal in January will expire in September of this year, providing lawmakers another chance to promote sustainable farms.

“Too much of agriculture today is dominated by polluting factory farms,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, regional program director. “But it doesn’t have to be this way, especially here in Virginia.”

For more information on our work to promote healthy, local farms in Virginia, visit www.EnvironmentVirginia.org or follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/EnvironmentVA

Charlottesville City Market
Recent action

Partnering with Moran to increase efficiency
Environment Virginia, Congressman Jim Moran, and the BlueGreen Alliance came together in March to outline top tips for home and business owners to clean up their energy use and protect our environment.

More than a third of the energy we use in the United States goes toward powering the buildings where we live and work. Powering America’s buildings is an act responsible for 30 percent of our nation’s global warming pollution. Much of this energy is wasted through leaky windows, inefficient lighting, heating or cooling systems, and poor construction techniques. But there are easy things all homeowners can do to cut down on energy use.

The top energy efficiency tips include installing ceiling fans, covering windows, cleaning and maintaining air conditions, using energy efficient lighting and sealing leaks.

“We can sweep wasted energy and global warming pollution out the door by making our buildings more energy efficient and by powering them with clean, renewable energy,” said Courtney Abrams, Environment Virginia’s federal energy advocate.

Showing support for new EPA nominee
As the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held its confirmation hearing for Gina McCarthy, President Obama’s nominee to lead the Environmental Protection Agency, Environment Virginia’s Sarah Bucci issued the following statement in response:

“Gina McCarthy’s stellar record of winning real results for our environment and public health—under both Republican and Democratic administrations—makes her an excellent pick to be the next head of EPA. Because when it comes to protecting our health and environment, it isn’t about who you work for or what party you represent. It’s about whether you can get the job done. And Gina McCarthy has proven she can get the job done.”

To our members

These past few months were all about partnering for progress. We made some great headway on the campaigns you care about, because we had some great people standing beside us. For example, Rep. Moran and the Blue Green Alliance joined us in looking into how we could increase the efficiency of our homes and businesses. We hosted a climate legacy town hall meeting with the Sierra Club in March and 40,000 people came together for the “Forward on Climate” rally.

It’s all about coming together. And because you’ve stood with us on so many important issues before, we’ve been able to accomplish so much.

I hope you’ll continue to support the work that we do. Now, more than ever, we need the political power of thousands of citizens across the state to back up our advocacy. After all, against sometimes-incredible odds, your membership is allowing us to make progress.

Elizabeth Ouzts
Regional Program Director

Toward a greener future

Environment Virginia and Environment Virginia Research & Policy Center gratefully accept bequests, beneficiary designations of IRAs and life insurance, and gifts of securities to support our work to build a cleaner, greener, healthier future.

For more information, call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: PlannedGiving@EnvironmentVirginia.org.

Photo: USDA

Cooper Vineyards visitor’s center in Louisa, Va. is Platinum LEED certified
In March, more than 60 activists and concerned citizens attended a Climate Legacy Town Hall meeting in Old Town Alexandria. This event is part of a nationwide effort to accept President Obama’s invitation for a national conversation about global warming.

Hosted by the Sierra Club and Environment Virginia, the town hall featured a presentation by renowned clean energy expert Dr. Willett Kempton from the University of Delaware. Dr. Kempton discussed his new study that shows how a mix of renewable energy sources together can be the key to transitioning the region toward a clean energy future.

“Today’s event shows the continued momentum behind our call for clean energy and climate action,” said Phillip Ellis, Beyond Coal Virginia coordinator with the Sierra Club. “In February, thousands of Virginians traveled to Washington, D.C., to call for the president to move Forward on Climate and now, many have come to hear more about how we can transition to a clean energy future here in the Mid-Atlantic.”

Nine months after the Derecho and other severe storms brought 80 mile-per-hours winds to Roanoke, an April Virginia Research & Policy Center report found that weather-related disasters are already affecting hundreds of millions of Americans, and documents how global warming could lead to certain extreme weather events becoming even more common or more severe in the future.

**9 out of 10 Virginians**
According to the report entitled, “In the Path of the Storm,” from Hurricane Sandy to the severe storms that swept through southwestern Virginia last summer, the report found that more than nine out of 10 Virginians live in counties hit by at least one weather-related disaster since 2007.

“Millions of Virginians have endured extreme weather causing extremely big problems for Virginia’s health, safety, environment and economy,” said Sarah Bucci, field organizer with Environment Virginia Research & Policy Center. “Given that global warming will likely fuel even more extreme weather, we need to cut dangerous carbon pollution now.”

Environment Virginia Research & Policy Center was joined by state Sen. John Edwards (D-Roanoke) and Lee Clark, CEO of the American Red Cross—Virginia Mountain Region in releasing the new report.

The report examined county-level weather-related disaster declaration data from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for 2007 through 2012 to determine how many Virginians live in counties hit by recent weather disasters.

**$1 billion in damages**
Recent weather-related disasters in the City of Roanoke and surrounding counties included severe storms and straight-line winds last summer and severe winter snowstorms in 2010. And in 2012 alone, federally declared weather-related disasters affected 82 Virginia counties housing nearly 3.5 million people. Nationally, 11 weather disasters inflicted economic damages of $1 billion or more.

**Rainier days in a warmer world**
Other research shows that the Virginia has experienced an increase in heavy precipitation events, with the rainiest 1 percent of all storms delivering 33 percent more rain on average at the end of the 20th century than at the beginning. The trend towards extreme precipitation is projected to continue in a warming world, even though higher temperatures and drier summers will likely also increase the risk of drought in between the rainy periods and for certain parts of the country.

“Extreme weather is happening. It is causing very serious problems, and global warming increases the likelihood that we’ll see even more extreme weather in the future,” said Sen. Edwards. “Scientists tell us that carbon pollution from our power plants, cars and trucks is fueling global warming, and so tackling global warming demands that we cut emissions of carbon pollution.”

To read the full report visit www.EnvironmentVirginiaCenter.org
In February, roughly 40,000 Americans, including many Virginians, came together in D.C., for the “Forward on Climate” rally. Tens of thousands of others across the country gathered at dozens of simultaneous rallies to reject the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline; put a cap on carbon pollution from new and existing power plants; and expand renewable energy programs.

Earlier this year, President Obama renewed his promise to tackle global warming by saying, “The failure to do so would betray our children and future generations.” And then, in his State of the Union Address, he added, “If Congress won’t act soon to protect future generations, I will.”

Environment Virginia is working to garner the public support he needs to tackle global warming and cut carbon pollution from the source, as well as reject any project that threatens our future.

“This was a remarkably important event,” said Sarah Bucci, field organizer. “It is obviously quite clear that Virginians and people across the country want action on this issue, and they want it now.”

**more inside**

Report documents extreme weather in Virginia; Supporting healthy, local farms; Increasing energy efficiency with Rep. Moran, and more.

“Forward on Climate” rally in Washington, D.C.