



Friends of Toppenish Creek

January 4, 2017

Mark Clark
Executive Director Washington Conservation Commission
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mclark@scc.wa.gov

Dear Director Clark,

Friends of Toppenish Creek is a 501 C(3) non-profit group in the Yakima Valley with a focus on the environmental and public health impacts from abuses by mis-managed industrial agriculture. We address air and water quality issues in our community and actively participate in the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) advisory committee.

In that capacity we interact with the South Yakima Conservation District on a monthly basis. SYCD states, "Our primary goal is to promote the wise use, development, and conservation of our renewable natural resources in our district by providing assistance to local landowners to solve conservation resource problems."

This is a letter of complaint against the Director for the SYCD, Laurie Crowe. Ms. Crowe has repeatedly told members of the GWMA that manure composting operations in the valley do not leach pollutants to the groundwater because the heavy equipment that is involved in composting compacts the soil. As recently as December 1, 2016, at a meeting of the GWMA CAFO/Livestock Work Group, she stated that there is a "manure seal" that prevents leaching from compost yards.

Steve George tells us, and Ms. Crowe concurs, that Yakima dairy composting operations have pipes and drains that direct leachate to lagoons. This is simply not true. Many, many composting operations are located far from lagoons and ponds.

Since last summer FOTC has been aware of deep soil testing that demonstrates leaching of nitrates, ammonia, and total nitrogen well below the bare soils that make up the “floors” of the compost yards. However, we recently learned of more egregious pollution on a 15 year old compost yard where nitrogen readings are as high as 256 ppm at 12 feet of soil depth. The results are attached.

Because the SYCD is funded by taxpayers, this organization has the statutory obligation to know the most current results of soil testing and research. Sadly, the SYCD, although closely involved in discussions and analyses of manure management, seems to be unaware of this important information.

Nevertheless, Laure Crowe has sat at the GWMA table and consistently given inaccurate information to meeting members. We relied on her, as a nutrient management expert, to give us the facts. If she did not know about this data, she was not doing her job. If Ms. Crowe did know and chose to give incorrect information, then her behavior is borderline criminal and unethical.

With this evidence in hand, we assert that Ms. Crowe does not act in good faith, that she has “hijacked” the conservation goals of the SYCD, and has used her position of authority to shield polluting dairies and promote pollution of the groundwater in the Yakima Valley.

We respectfully ask the Washington State Conservation Commission to investigate, discipline Ms. Crowe and take measures that ensure honest and ethical actions from the South Yakima Conservation District that promote conservation of natural resources including soil, air and water. We are prepared to talk about this issue in greater depth.

Sincerely,

Jean Mendoza

Executive Director, Friends of Toppenish Creek

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