



February 28, 2024

Members of the Committee:

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) strongly supports HF 4135 (Hansen) which establishes an account to address nitrate pollution of private wells, a \$0.99 per-ton fee on nitrogen fertilizers, and requires testing of land-applied biosolid fertilizer for PFAS “forever chemical” pollutants.

The nitrate pollution issue has been known to Minnesota lawmakers for many years but not enough has been done to address it. In January 2001, the late John Helland, who at that time was a legislative analyst and later served as MCEA’s Board President, wrote a House Research report about the Groundwater Protection Act. One bullet stood out: “[t]he state has no **comprehensive plan for dealing with nitrate contamination.**” The petition to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from MCEA and ten other local, statewide, and national groups highlighting the nitrate pollution in southeastern Minnesota has broken the logjam on action in state agencies and at the Legislature. **Minnesota still needs a comprehensive plan to address nitrate contamination of our drinking water, and HF 4135 is a crucial step forward.**

A permanent fund and funding source is needed: The Minnesota Department of Health has estimated that the immediate response to assess nitrate pollution and to provide treatment systems or well improvements will be approximately \$40 million in the eight counties covered by the EPA. This is far beyond the scope of one-time sources of funds, and this will be an ongoing need. HF 4135 establishes a permanent account funded by fertilizer sales that are contributing to this problem.

Support to county community health boards is a good model: Iowa established a [Grants-to-Counties program for well testing](#) in 1987 which is funded by a per-ton fee on fertilizer sales. HF 4135 uses a similar approach, sending funds from the private well drinking water assistance account to community health boards in affected counties. While HF 4135 targets these funds toward the eight-county area in SE Minnesota, this is a scalable model that can be expanded over time to address similar nitrate contamination in other parts of Minnesota.

Testing provisions for PFAS are also an important part of this bill: Currently, there is no requirement to test land-applied biosolids used as fertilizer for PFAS compounds. Research conducted by MCEA and Dr. Matt Simcik found PFAS pollution downstream of areas with land-applied biosolids fertilizer. Our report [“Forever Chemicals in our Wastewater”](#) released in November 2023 documented this connection. It’s common sense that Minnesota should require testing to determine the extent of PFAS contamination in land-applied biosolid fertilizer.

Every Minnesotan has a right to clean, safe drinking water, whether they get their water from a private well or from a public drinking water system. HF 4135 is an important step toward making this value statement a reality. Thank you to Rep. Hansen for authoring this bill.

Sincerely,

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