



**BUILDING PEOPLE POWER
FOR ENERGY & CLIMATE JUSTICE**

July 30, 2018

Dr. Vincent E. Price
President
Duke University

Lynn J. Good
President and CEO
Duke Energy Corporation

Subject: With potential hog waste conversion to usable biogas, please help neighbors of industrial hog operations

Dear President Price and President Good:

NC WARN appreciates that President Price listened to campus-related and community voices in the spring by indefinitely suspending plans to allow Duke Energy to build a fracked gas-burning power plant on campus. Now, we hope you will open up the discussion so that students, alumni, community members and nonprofit experts urging cheaper, renewable energy solutions can help the University become a national leader in the effort to avert runaway climate chaos.

In addition, we note with keen interest the University's announced plans to invest serious resources into advancing the development of swine biogas technology based on your Ray Farm pilot project. At nearly the same time, Duke Energy widely publicized its five-farm biogas project in Duplin County, with state president David Fountain declaring it a "major breakthrough for renewable energy in North Carolina." It's hard not to view that as a major overstatement.

It seems odd that both announcements were made just as the long-planned lawsuits by hog operation neighbors were getting underway, and that both Dukes' publicity could be construed as implying that the decades-long challenge of safely handling the vast amounts of manure from giant hog operations has, at long last, been solved. The available evidence indicates otherwise.

To be clear, we will applaud the University or Duke Energy if you can indeed solve the incredible challenge of the methane gas emanating from this state's thousands of industrial hog operations – especially given methane's increasingly prominent role in driving the climate crisis – but any such solution must include measures to relieve the incredible suffering of those living nearby due to air and water contamination. That suffering is, of course, the focus of the series of nuisance lawsuits.

The abundant publicity and news coverage about the University's and Duke Energy's biogas projects includes little indication that there will be significant relief for the people living near those enormous cesspools filled with millions of gallons of feces and urine. In fact, among the few technical data

available regarding your plans, the University's diagram indicates continued use of the industrial spray equipment that now spreads the cesspool waste into the neighbors' air and onto farm fields, and continually pollutes surface and ground water. The spray-field process is labeled "irrigation."

At your April 10th forum, the campus panelists seemed clearly eager to begin the work to help solve the hog waste-to-biogas dilemma, but indicated that no serious technology upgrades have occurred in several years. One panelist referred to her hope that biogas development will also improve conditions for hog farm neighbors, that it should create "considerable reduction in odors" and "address pathogens" being emitted. But the chance of actualizing those hopes seems remote.

Meanwhile, Duke Energy's biogas project developer, Optima KV, has a website with virtually no information, and regulatory filings are equally devoid of technical data.

It seems quite unlikely that both Dukes would so extensively promote your swine biogas initiatives without also emphasizing reductions in air and water pollution, if indeed any substantial benefits existed. We find no data from any source that shows such benefits based on the state of the art for biogas technology.

QUESTION: Is our interpretation correct that, so far, use of swine biogas by both Dukes involves little if any relief from air and water pollution? Please provide any information to the contrary and explain why it wasn't strong enough to be included in the publicity about your swine biogas projects.

On a related note, we appreciate the University's hopes of helping grow a swine biogas market in North Carolina – if the technology also reduces local impacts and is not used by the hog industry as an argument for lifting the moratorium on new and expanded operations.

However, it doesn't appear that Duke Energy shares the intention of growing the industry. Despite its recent publicity, it seems clear that Duke Energy plans to do only the minimum of biogas required under the state renewable energy portfolio standard: 0.2 percent of its overall generation. The exclusion of any cost references in the utility's high-profile rollout makes it fairly obvious that any recent technology advances have been insufficient to bring the costs down or to even allow any projection that they will decline. Also, Duke Energy's 15-year Integrated Resource Plan does not reflect plans to significantly increase its use of swine biogas,

Therefore, if our interpretation is correct, there has been no technology breakthrough that would hold hope for significant relief for thousands of North Carolinians directly suffering from industrial hog operations. Additionally, even if the current swine biogas technology did reduce air and water contamination, the state's dominant utility has no current plans to advance its reliance on biogas.

A CHALLENGE FOR TWO DUKES

We urge both of you to view this recent [18-minute documentary](#) airing the voices of many of the very people whose lives have been turned upside down following the secretive but massive advance

of industrial hog operations across eastern North Carolina that began some 30 years ago. This extended tragedy has been too long hidden – out of sight, out of mind – from the millions of state residents who experience the region as merely part of their ride to the beach.

As noted in the film, these same communities are on the front lines of the hurricanes, flooding from torrential rains upstream, and other impacts of climate change that are growing more ominous. They also are among the communities struggling for decades with poverty which, along with multiple environmental injustices, has created what one speaker equated to living in a “third world country.”

As a long-time and active member of the NC Environmental Justice Network, NC WARN challenges you as state leaders to genuinely devote your technical and financial resources to help solve this tragedy, which impacts all state residents whether they realize it or not. We also call for you to use your influence on state decision makers and help the general public understand the depth of misery being inflicted in their name and on their watch.

Most of all, whether you choose or are able to truly help solve this ongoing disaster, please avoid having your officials exploit the misery by acting as if you’ve solved the swine biogas problem, unless you also help reduce the local suffering. Be forthcoming about the level of any actual achievements. Don’t greenwash your corporate and institutional images on the backs of those in pain.

For too many years, state leaders have failed to do right by hog farm neighbors, workers, the small farmers and the millions of animals, all of whom have been locked in a gruesome dance that is decimating one of our greatest treasures – the natural beauty and richness of eastern North Carolina and, most of all, its people and culture.

This tragedy needs genuine leadership. We hope that you will enlist the help of both Governor Cooper and Attorney General Josh Stein to find a cooperative way to rise to this compelling moral challenge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Warren". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jim Warren
Executive Director

cc. Governor Roy Cooper
Attorney General Josh Stein