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Livingston Co. hog farm being built despite objections

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December 12, 2011 7:43 pm • By Kevin Barlow | kbarlow@pantagraph.com (0) Comments

SAUNEMIN — One of two sites for a proposed hog farm near Saunemin is under construction despite protests by neighbors and a recommendation against the project from the Livingston County Board.

In June, Patrick Harms filed a notice of intent with the Illinois Department of Agriculture to construct two, 1,800-head hog buildings on property he owns three miles east of Saunemin. On Nov. 30, the department approved the construction, indicating all criteria of the Livestock Management Facilities Act had been met for one of the two sites.

The second application for a site about two miles east of the first site remains pending.

“This is an expansion of our current hog operation,” Harms said. “The Harms family has been a part of living in this area for 61 years and in order to keep the business going, farmers need to be able to diversify.”

Construction is expected to be completed by February.

During the application process, several neighbors voiced opposition to the plan. More than 50 people turned out for a public hearing in August in Pontiac to speak out against the operation. In September, the Livingston County Board recommended the IDOA reject the proposal, citing many of the objections voiced by neighbors, such as Julie Fox.

“When the County Board decided to recommend denial of the application, they voted that a hydrology study be done with the results meeting the satisfaction of the neighbors with regard to their water supplies,” she said. “Neither the study nor the results meet my satisfaction.”

Warren Goetsch, bureau chief of environmental programs with the IDOA, said Harms hired the Illinois State Water Survey to study what impact the farm might have on neighboring wells.

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“We felt those issues were appropriately addressed,” Goetsch said.

Even though construction has started, the IDOA still will have to sign off on the project before it goes into service, Goetsch said.

“This is really just the initial approval,” he said. “We still have to oversee construction and make sure they follow through on their design plans. After construction is finished, we will do another study to make sure everything is in order before it goes into service.”

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