

ER SPREAD SLUDGE ON HIS FIELDS, THEN THEIR WELLS BECAME CONTAMINATED

Linda Donaldson and her husband, Roger, sold the farm that had been in her family for 150 years and moved to Campbellford to get away from sludge — only to find it being spread there, too.

"It has just totally devastated us," says Linda, a retired nurse practitioner. When they became ill after the sludging, she drove to every house in a large circle around the site and discovered 22 people were sick with the same symptoms.

Since then, families' wells have become contaminated and people have been told not to drink the water. They blame it all on biosolids.

6 *I remember standing on the road watching it spray 25, 30 feet*

WENDY DEAVITT

"I remember standing on the road watching it spray 25, 30 feet into the air," says Deavitt. "My eyes were burning from the smell. It makes you want to vomit."

Her six horses, donkey, cats and

dog all became ill with diarrhea, swollen lymph nodes and other ailments. She has sent some to live elsewhere for the sake of their health.

In the fall of 2006, the couples organized a letter- and email-writing campaign to local health authorities and government officials about their medical problems. Last December, the medical officer of health for the area, Dr. Lynn Noseworthy, sent them letters saying she had investigated but failed to find a "causal relationship" between their ill health and biosolids.

Noseworthy said her investiga-

tion of the cases included reviews of literature, correspondence and medical information as well as consultations with the environment ministry and health ministry. While she concluded sludge didn't cause the illnesses, she didn't determine what did.

The group, however, isn't satisfied. The attitude at Queen's Park is "we're making all this up," says Deavitt, who worked in the medical field for 14 years.

"There's so much proof here — what are they waiting for, a body count?"

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Farmers split over safety

Free biosolids tempting at a time when prices of commercial fertilizer are skyrocketing

CAROLA VYHNAK
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The price is right. With savings of more than \$100 an acre for fertilizer, the offer of free stuff is tempting for farmers struggling to make a living in the face of rising costs and diminishing returns.

Harry Buurma wishes he could get enough sludge to cover his entire 3,000-acre farm in Watford, partway between London and Sarnia. As it is, he supplements commercial fertilizer with biosolids to feed his cash crops. Sludging cornfields, for example, saves him \$75 on fertilizing costs of \$150 per acre, he says.

"Fertilizer prices have doubled and tripled so biosolids are a better deal than ever," says Buurma, who uses both free liquid sludge and dried sludge pellets that cost him \$19 a tonne.

The pellets have less odour and a reduced pathogen content, and there are fewer restrictions on when and how they can be applied, he says.

The beauty of biosolids, apart from the price, is their nutrients and organic matter, says Buurma, who believes they are as safe as pig or cow manure. "The soil and plants process this stuff and render everything harmless. We're not eating it directly."

He scoffs at statements that contaminants from industrial waste find their way into biosolids.

"That's a total misconception. Industrial waste doesn't go into city sewers. Twenty or 30 years ago, yes, but the level of heavy metals — except for copper — has been reduced 90 per cent. We have a really tight system now."

The "real crime," he says, is that not all biosolids are spread on farmland. "Taking the stuff to landfill is wrong, really wrong," especially when the ingredients in fertilizer will run out in 50 years, Buurma says.

But while biosolids are fine for his crops, he is not so sure about vegeta-

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