

Now committee to monitor Good Spirit water quality

by Jack Dawes

"We don't know what an intensive hog operation will bring to an environment... and so we can never ever be too cautious about our approach."

With those words Agriculture Minister Clay Serby concluded a Wednesday news conference in Yorkton where he announced a new committee to monitor water quality as three hog barns are expected to begin operations northwest of Good Spirit Lake within the next year.

The appointments include a range of cottage and land owners in the Good Spirit Watershed, members of the hog development group, government environment and agriculture people along side of tourism and economic development committee members.

Serby said the goal was to balance the environmental issues with sustaining agriculture in the province.

The committee may mark a new development in government policy on intensive livestock operations. Eric Upshall, a previous agriculture minister, undertook an extensive review of departmental procedures after a court fight was ignited when pork entrepreneur Florian Possberg built three barns in the Lintlaw area several years ago.

Having just taken the reigns with the June departure of Dwan Lingenfelter, Serby now is saying the just-appointed committee may actually influence future policy.

That is in spite of the fact that the committee so far has no set budget and no defined operating protocol.

Serby was clear that hog barns are here to stay and likely more will be permitted.

"We shouldn't stand in the way of people doing good work," he said. "Nor should we be immune to not changing public policy or standards."

Serby went on to say that if the committee determines rules need to be tightened or relaxed, for that matter, "Hopefully this committee will provide us with that kind of direction."

Serby said that direction could run to economic

development goals for agriculture as well as environmental requirements.

Serby confirms the committee is "likely unique in Canada" in its make up and purpose and suggested it would provide a "benchmark" mechanism to measure the impact of hog barns on the environment. He said the committee would make public statements about surface and well water in the Good Spirit Basin.

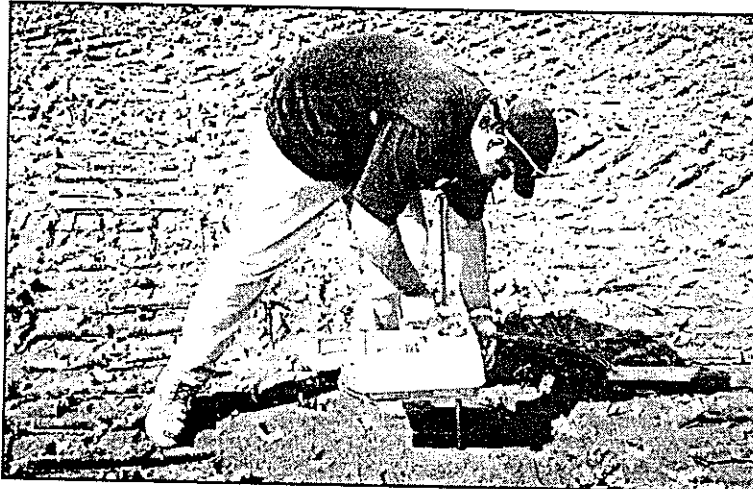
Serby is a cottage owner on Good Spirit Lake. He has appointed cottage owner representative Don Walters of Yorkton as committee chair and chief spokesman.

Walters says as long as there are hog barns, the water quality committee will be active.

"Our concern with Good Spirit Lake is not with this generation but for future generations to make sure the environment is clean and it's safe and it's sound...not just somebody doing their own monitoring," Walters told reporters gathered at Serby's Yorkton office. "And we would also be accountable to the public."

Walters says the committee might use news releases or other means of publicizing water and soil test results.

Walters is an appointee of the Good Spirit Lake Cottage Owners Association. Neither he nor Serby had specific information on the operation of the committee, nor could they say when or how often it will meet. Walters had no specifics about how the committee would monitor the potential downstream effects of three large hog barns now under construction in the RM of Invermay by Rama Hog Ventures and Big



Kyle Walkdon of Machebroda Engineering checks the compaction of the first layer of clay in the Earthen Manure Storage system at the Big Sky Nursery barn site near Rama. Agriculture Minister Clay Serby has appointed a committee to watch over the water quality due to the hog operation near Good Spirit Lake.

Sky Farms of Humboldt.

Serby also confirmed no exact budget parameters have been established, simply noting, "The committee will decide what it needs."

Walters confirmed the committee has been promised no powers of intervention.

"If something does happen, then we report to the minister and it's up to the government to do something about it," he said.

Serby says although the committee's prime responsibility will be to monitor water quality there is a broader agenda.

Serby says the flip side of the environmental safety aspect is economic development and the sustainability of agriculture as an industry of which hogs is only one part.

Serby says that is why the committee is comprised not only of farmers, hog barn developers and cottage owners but also tourism and economic development resource people.

"Because what we need here is a balance.

We want to make sure that at the same time as we grow the industry that we are not jeopardizing our tourism economy or...

quality of life and safety," Serby said. "It's not only about the lake. It's about the people who live in the area."

A group called Friends of Good Spirit Lake is among those which has questioned the location of nearby hog barns. So has the Good Spirit Cottage Owners group, some local farmers and several residents of the Buchanan area.

Florian Possberg of Big Sky farms confirms that initial earth work has begun on one of the proposed structures, a breeder barn southeast of Rama where sewer lines and other underground features are being placed. The earthwork is nearly complete on a nursery barn southwest of Rama.

Possberg expects earth work soon on a feeder barn northeast of Rama. He confirms Rama Hog Ventures is finalizing plans for water supply to the operation. That water may come from wells or a surface supply currently housed behind a CN Rail water structure nearby.