

Madge and Woody Bishop - Portage County

“We are not outsiders to Wisconsin farming. My family has farmed for 6 generations, starting before Wisconsin was a state. I grew up with a family ethic of responsible farming, with the knowledge that if you take care of the land, the land will take care of you. Now with the corporate farms and mega-dairies that are taking over farming in the Central Sands region of the state, I feel outraged and betrayed, because the only objective I see them pursuing is maximization of the financial bottom line.”

This is a statement by Edwin (Woody) Bishop, a PhD sociologist who teaches at UW Stevens Point, and his wife Madge Bishop, an educator and psychologist. Madge and Woody moved to Portage County, one of the Central Sands counties, in 1976. They had their well water tested in 1979, revealing a nitrate level of 2.1. Subsequent tests and nitrate levels were 1984 (4.0), 1992 (6.6), and 2017 (10.9). Water with a nitrate level above 10.0 is considered unsafe to drink, and the Bishops are now using bottled water for drinking rather than their well water.

In addition to the inconvenience of buying bottled water, Woody and Madge are concerned with the impact of nitrate contamination on the value and salability of their property. There are large corporate farms as close as a half-mile of their home, and the Bishops believe that the fertilization practices of these (and possibly other) farms are the cause of the increasing nitrate levels of their well water. They also realize that agribusiness (corporate farms, = mega-dairies and their lobbying groups) exercises substantial political influence in Madison. Nevertheless, they are hopeful that the efforts of citizens groups such as CSWAC will ultimately lead to more balanced agricultural practices in the Central Sands region.