

Dear Dane County Board of Supervisors,

My name is Richard VanDomelen and I serve as the staff veterinarian and facility manager at Ridgland Farms. You may be familiar with our facility as we have been part of this community for nearly 60 years. Or perhaps you know our name because we have recently been targeted by groups both in and outside of our state that are opposed to necessary biomedical research in animals. As I'm certain you are aware, these groups have successfully lobbied for the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate our research facility. This ongoing investigation comes despite the fact that we are already highly regulated at both the state and federal level. Our oversight includes frequent, unannounced inspections by animal care experts, including veterinarians, employed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) who are charged with ensuring the ethical treatment of animals involved in research.

Because so much has been said about our organization over the past several months and years, I am reaching out to you directly to provide some important information and context so you can better understand the critical role we play in developing treatments and medications that benefit humans and animals alike.

Of course, we are also extremely concerned about the proposed resolution to urge a halt to our longstanding operations and remove our animals, despite the fact that no official findings about our organization have been released. If a resolution like that were to pass, it would cause unfair and irreparable damage to a longtime Dane County business that has operated legally under federal and state laws since 1966. Additionally, a highly damaging proclamation such as this would also cause significant hardships for 25 local residents who are employed by our breeding and research facility and rely on us to help them support their families.

The draft resolution calls for placing Ridgland Farms' dogs in custodial care. Doing so would be catastrophic. As a licensed research facility, we have strict biosecurity and preventative health practices in place to isolate our dogs from diseases and parasites that are prevalent outside of our facility. Many of our dogs are enrolled in research protocols, many which are overseen by the USDA, and any deviation from conducting these studies in the required, controlled environment would invalidate the study.

In fairness, it's also important to remember how the campaign against Ridgland Farms was initiated. In April 2017, a group of activists from a California-based animal rights group travelled across the country and broke into our facility, an act they have committed in several other states as well. While at Ridgland Farms, they took three of our dogs, something

which they have freely admitted. These actions naturally resulted in legal charges and a planned trial. However, our company eventually decided to ask that the charges be dropped after learning that activists were planning to use the proceedings and the resulting news coverage to take their campaign against our small company to a national level. We feared for our employees and their safety after seeing similar campaigns overseas and as a result, we made the incredibly difficult decision to end those legal proceedings.

As I mentioned previously, Ridglan Farms is a USDA licensed and inspected breeder of beagles for research purposes. We are also a USDA licensed and inspected research facility. Because this is the case, there is extensive documentation which demonstrates our commitment to providing excellent animal care. Over the past 11 years, Ridglan Farms has been thoroughly inspected 14 times and in no instances have we received a critical citation, meaning that no animals were found to be at high risk for suffering or adverse effects. In addition, during those 14 inspections, animal care experts indicated that “no noncompliant items were identified”, meaning they found no instances where Animal Welfare Act guidelines were not followed.

In the two cases where issues were noted, these were minor items deemed non-critical by the USDA because they did not have any significant impacts on animals. Furthermore, those items were immediately addressed as they were followed by clean inspections where no problems were found.

If you are interested in viewing these inspection notices on your own, we invite you to do so. Simply search “Ridglan Farms” [using this facility inspection search engine located on the United States Department of Agriculture website.](#)

It’s also important to note that many veterinarians from companies that we do business with annually inspect our facility and our animals on their own to ensure our operations are ethical and compliant with all animal welfare laws. These experts have repeatedly found the health of our animals and level of care we provide to be excellent.

Finally, because our facility breeds animals and conducts research onsite, I think it would be helpful for you to have additional information about the kinds of research our dogs are involved in. Simply put, the vast majority of our studies benefit animals directly. Over 90% of the dogs we sell go to companies that develop new vaccines and other health treatments for dogs. We’re extremely proud of the work we do and the fact that it results in products that significantly improve the health and well-being of pet dogs across the United States and worldwide.

In closing, out of fairness to our longstanding community business I kindly ask that you not move forward with the proposed resolution or that you at least table a decision and defer to

the government agencies who have regulatory authority over Ridglan Farms' operations. I also hope you will take the time to review the extensive federal documentation I have shared above, that illustrates our deep commitment to excellent and ethical animal care.

Thank you for your time and I welcome additional discussion with you.

Sincerely,

Richard J. VanDomelen DVM