



P R E S I D E N T ' S P A G E

# MINNESOTA MAINSTAYS: AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

BY JON DUCKSTAD

*"The environment is everything that isn't me."*

— Albert Einstein

Minnesota, "Land of 10,000 Lakes," invokes an image of clean air, an abundance of pure water without any appreciable environmental concerns, rural landscapes peppered with small family farms, and roomy pastures filled with farm livestock.

According to a recent issue of *Conservation Volunteer*, a magazine of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), "Minnesota is the nation's third-largest hog-raising state, first in turkeys, fifth in dairy cows. Livestock produce \$3.9 billion in farm revenues each year; and Minnesota's dairy industry alone employs more local workers than Northwest Airlines, 3M, and Target combined."

In recent years, rural Minnesota has experienced a marked decrease in small farms, and a concurrent increase in large livestock feedlot production. Changes in the industry and the economy have brought pressures to bear on Minnesota livestock farmers, propelling many into long-term relationships with agribusiness organizations. The companies own the livestock, construct the confinement and waste containment facilities, and prescribe the feeding regimens which the farmers execute. In return, the farmers benefit from reduced risk and a more reliable income stream.

The problems arise in that policies and practices geared to the days of family farms and free-ranging livestock aren't always adequate to meet the challenges posed by high-



Glenwood attorneys Karna and Jim Peters are at the cutting edge of efforts to balance concerns for agricultural productivity with environmental stewardship in greater Minnesota.

density livestock operations. Large livestock feedlots have thus become controversial in Minnesota, as they are in other states. Environmental concerns include air pollution, groundwater contamination, surface water contamination, and the long-term reliability of waste containment facilities.

In west-central Minnesota you can find all these things represented — the beautiful lakes, the small family farms, the large feedlots, waste containment facilities, and attendant problems. You can also find lawyers for whom the environment means business.

Jim and Karna Peters of Glenwood meet this definition in several ways. As the fourth generation scion of the founder of Peters Resort on Lake Minnewaska, Jim continues in the family business, serving as golf pro for the resort while sharing in law practice with his wife from offices in Alexandria. Karna commutes several days each week to 3M headquarters in Oakdale where she advises the corporation on environmental compliance issues. In their private practice the couple have also pursued a variety of environmental actions around the state, representing citizen groups in pursuit

of environmental review of agricultural and other projects. Citizen concerns regarding the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the health of Minnesota's state forests are among the issues these lawyers have called on the courts to address.

Minnesotans can take pride in the agricultural productivity of their state, as well as the beauty and health of its air, lands and waters. With the help of attorneys like the Peters, we can hope to balance the two in the interest of all Minnesotans. □

### USDA Census of Agriculture Minnesota: 1982-1997

Number of farms	down 29%
Average farm size	up 30%
Farms with beef	down 22%
Beef per farm	No change
Farms with hogs	down 64%
Hogs per farm	up 254%
Dairy farms	down 60%
Dairy cows per farm	up 62%
Farms with turkeys	down 31%
Turkeys per farm	up 349%

**JON DUCKSTAD is president of the Minnesota State Bar Association. This month he visits Glenwood, MN, to visit Jim and Karna Peters.**

