

Protest raises quite a stink at capital

BY RACHEL RODEMANN
STAFF WRITER

June 26 — Leaders and supporters of several grassroots organizations presented Gov. Mike Easley with a gallon jug of hog waste Thursday as a culmination to a 51-hour Hog Vigil on the lawn in front of the N.C. legislative building.

The vigil, held in protest of the disposal of hog waste in eastern North Carolina lagoons, began June 17 when several dozen people from organizations including the Neuse River Foundation, the N.C. Environmental Justice League, the New River Foundation and the Waterkeeper Alliance gathered on the lawn.

The vigil ended when protesters marched first to the governor's mansion and next to his office in the state administration building, sporting protest signs and air masks, to deliver a gallon jug of hog waste.

"We hope he takes the lid off. He'll smell what these people smell every time they leave their houses," said Larry Baldwin, Lower Neuse Riverkeeper for the Neuse River Foundation, after delivering the jug to Easley's door.

The protest permit issued to the Hog Vigil expressly prohibited the substance on the Halifax lawn, so the group instead delivered it to the governor's office in a sealed

container.

Vigil organizers said in a press release that they were frustrated with Easley in particular because in 1999 he made campaign promises that he would phase-out and completely eliminate hog waste lagoons by 2004.

As of this year, North Carolina is the second-largest hog producing state in the nation and has more than 3,000 operational hog waste lagoons.

Angie Whitener, director of policy development and communications at the N.C. Hog Council, said the hog industry is responsible for more than 46,000 salaries and grosses more than \$9 billion a year.

"More than the entire RTP area,"

she said.

Vigil groups said one of the problems with these waste lagoons is that weather conditions such as high temperatures and shifting winds bring the smell of the waste to the neighboring communities, where it lingers.

Group representatives also say there is a risk of the lagoons overflowing with heavy rains and contaminating outside bodies of water.

Studies by the Environmental Defense Fund show that hog waste contamination can cause health risks for humans if it enters water supplies and poses environmental threats if it enters lakes or rivers.

But Whitener said the lagoons are the most effective method and

that they are similar to the system used for human waste disposal.

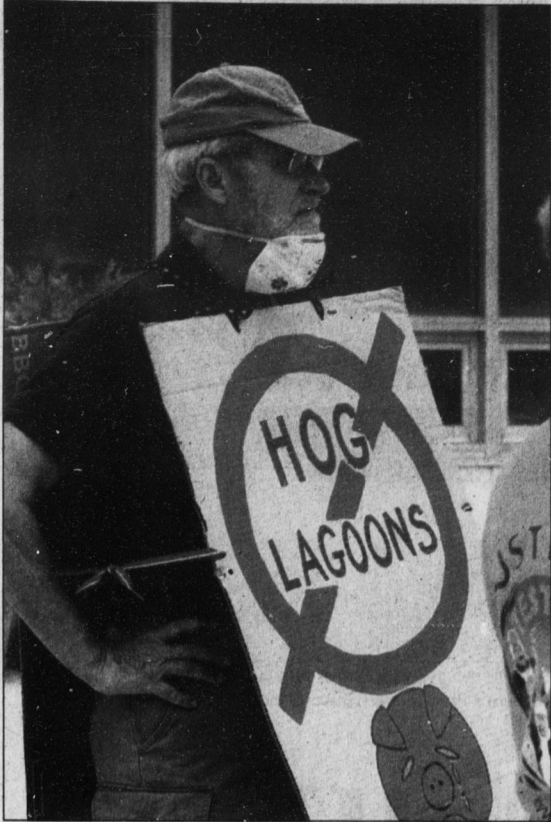
"There is nothing out there that is as efficient as lagoons," she said.

She also said there are several pilot programs to cover and contain lagoons, with more than 200 farmers already volunteering to try them, without the push of legislation.

But, Baldwin said that he and the other protesters would not be silenced until legislation is passed to eliminate all open lagoons.

Baldwin gestured to a picket sign depicting a crying pig and said, "This is Gov. Easley's legacy. We hope it won't be the next governor's legacy, too."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.



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Dave McCracken, president of the Neuse River Foundation, dons a sign and gas mask in protest of hog lagoons in eastern North Carolina.

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