

Case study 10: Conflicts of Interest

Group 1

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April 27, 2012

Recap of situation

Case 1: University Agribusiness Links

- **Environmental Quality Board** – planning a study of livestock operations
 - **U of M researchers** – hired to conduct various portions of the work
 - **Citizen's advisory group** – develop guidelines and identify topics of concern
 - **Clean Water Alliance of Minnesota**
 - **Agribusiness** – a source of U of M researchers' funding
- The study's conclusion would be predictably in favor of expanded livestock operations because of strong agribusiness connection.

The conflicts

Are there conflicts of interest?

- Yes, potential financial conflicts
- Not real or apparent (but may develop to real), not perceived
- Guidelines and topics are made by advisory group
- Not enough information on how companies are involved
- Study not started
- Conclusion of study – New policy (limit or expand) on livestock operations – Agribusiness companies financial gain or loss – Research funding
- Researcher may modify/compromise his judgment in order to safeguard existing/future funding
- Not scientific/academic/conscience/nepotism

Dealing with the potential conflict

Disclosure

- Required
- Disclose to Board members
 - Decision making/new policy
- Disclose to the public
 - Prevent loss of public confidence

Dealing with the potential conflict

Manage potential conflicts

- Not simple to remove conflicts
- Investigate on how the study will be carried out; who will be involved
- Modify the way of conducting the study so that result is unlikely to be biased
- May consider excluding some of the researchers
- Have advisory group reapprove the choice based on the disclosure provided
- Have a third-party agency monitor and evaluate the study
- Statistical analysis and conclusion

Dealing with the potential conflict

Best and worst ways

- Treat it seriously
- Worst way of dealing with it: ignore the problem and move forward



<http://livestockandenvironment.org>