

Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone

Commissioners:

I am a lifelong New Orleanian, and am very concerned about the Gulf of Mexico's dead zone. This area, which seems to grow larger each season, stretches along the Louisiana and Texas Gulf Coasts, and is fed by high levels of farm and industrial run-offs from half of this country and at least two Canadian provinces. Chief among these run-offs are pesticides* and fertilizer residues which wash down from farms and industries within the Mississippi Basin.

When these residues reach the Gulf of Mexico, they nourish algae blooms, which, upon dying, literally suck most or all of the oxygen out of the upper levels of the Gulf of Mexico. The algae decompose, sink to the bottom, and leave little or no oxygen for other marine life, including shrimp, crabs, and fish which cannot escape this zone.

While farmers in the Upper Midwest have met with fishermen and shrimpers down here, and have made the link between the use of pesticides and fertilizers on their farms and the problems with the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, that doesn't seem to be the case with the agribusiness giants like ADM and Cargill. These businesses, by promoting products which damage the Gulf's ecosystem, damage Louisiana's and Texas' fishing and shrimping industries, even as they tell us how much they're helping farmers to increase their crop yields, and killing off the insects which feed on corn, wheat, soybeans, and other crops, as well as cattle, pigs, sheep, and other livestock.

We need to have a healthy Gulf ecosystem, where our fish, shrimp, and other marine life can live out their lives, without being literally suffocated by algae blooms exacerbated by the pesticide and fertilizer run-offs washing down from the nation's "breadbasket" upriver.

The Gulf's dead zone is a serious problem for us. Its harmful effects rank right up there with the produced water and drilling mud pumped out of the oil and gas rigs strung out along the Gulf Coast, from Texas to Florida.

If we want a healthy Gulf of Mexico ecosystem, we should start with the root of the dead zone's problem: the chemical fertilizers and pesticides dumped into upper reaches of the Mississippi River, and traveling 1500 miles downstream to the Gulf of Mexico. There's a solution to our Gulf's dead zone, and it's already begun with the farmers. Now, it's time to focus on those who sell them the fertilizers and pesticides.

Wendy King

*Note: I understand that pesticide run-offs do not contribute to the algae blooms which worsen the Gulf's dead zone. Excess nitrogen is that problem's culprit. However, pesticide residues lead to fish kills in waterways.