

***Star Tribune* Commentary Page**

Letters

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'TROUBLED WATERS'

Society needs to change along with agriculture

The important point made in the Oct. 10 Star Tribune editorial "Censorship blights U's reputation" was the brief mention that the value of the film "Troubled Waters" is that it should start a much-needed conversation on the needs of a growing population and water quality.

Yet, as demonstrated by the nearby commentary from David Mulla ("Troubled Waters" tells only part of the water-quality story), that conversation wasn't beginning.

At the same time debate was raging over censorship of the film, the Journal of Environmental Quality was publishing research by University of Illinois scientists that once more confirmed that agriculture and tile drainage create the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Importantly, those conducting the research put it in the proper context. "Farmers are not to blame," said University of Illinois researcher Mark David. "They are using the same amount of nitrogen as they were 30 years ago and [are] getting much higher corn yields, but we have created a very leaky agricultural system. This allows nitrate to move quickly from fields into ditches and on to the Gulf of Mexico."

There is no mystery and can be no debate about what is happening and why. It is not, in the words of the editorial, "one-sided advocacy" to point out that nitrogen leaks from our agricultural system. Agriculture knows this is commonplace.

But, as also demonstrated, researchers and farmers are working on solutions, and many of us are trying to do what we can to help them. Implying that there are two sides to the story, as expressed in the editorial, or, even worse, implying that the facts aren't fact, as Mulla chose to do, is not helping them or anyone.

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