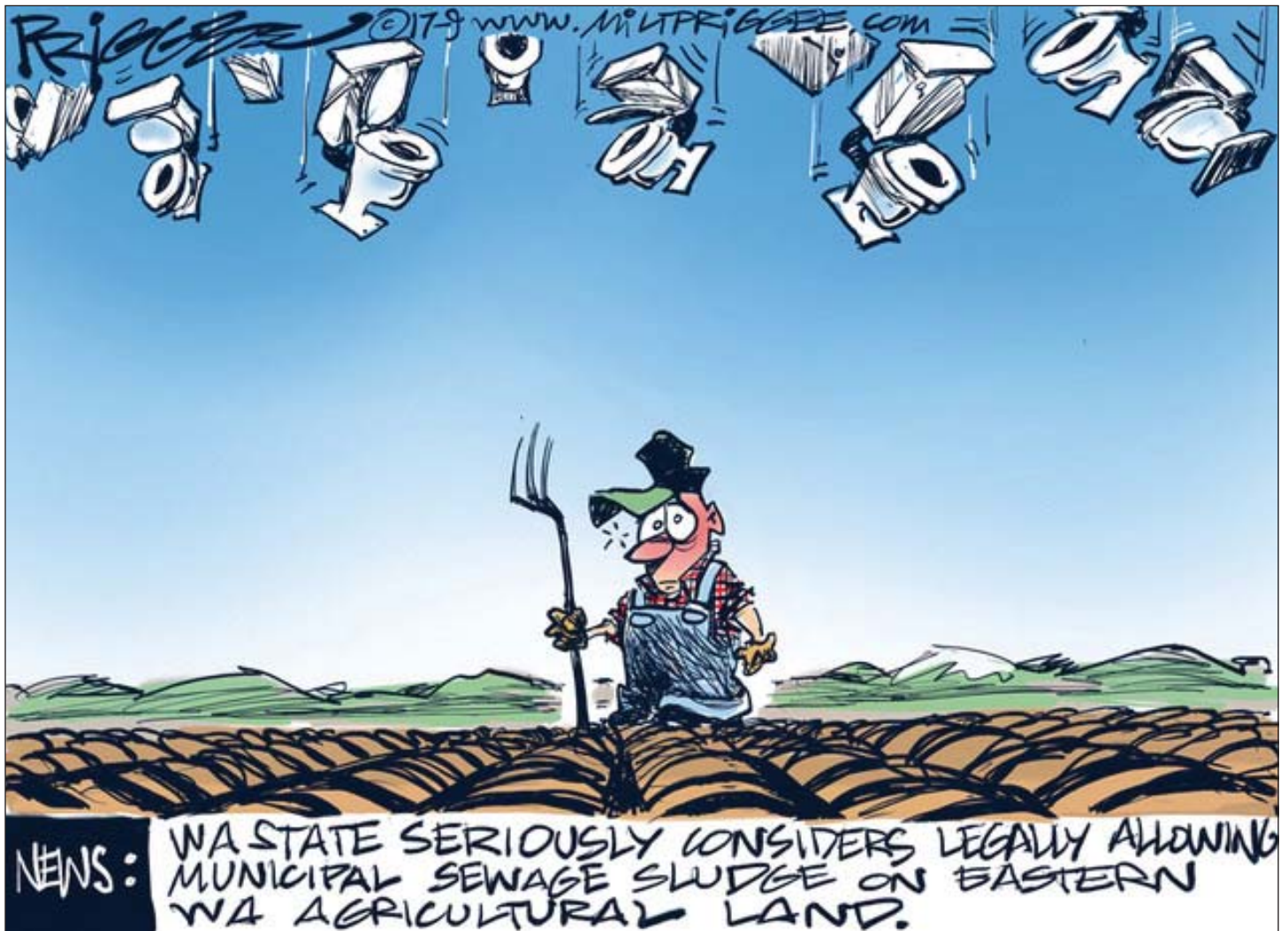


# Sewage Sludge Threatens Mill Canyon Aquifer and Organic Farms



By Morton Alexander, working with the Upper Columbia River Group

Cartoon courtesy of Columbia Institute for Water Policy

Rosman Farms, a wheat farm in eastern Washington, has asked the Washington State Department of Ecology for a permit to apply toxic sewage sludge as a soil amendment on nearly 2000 acres of its fields. After almost a year of deliberation, the agency has yet to issue approval, but indications are that it will.

Sewage sludge from large municipal wastewater treatment plants is known to contain 90,000 and more toxic chemicals and an array of pathogens. Food grown in soils containing sewage sludge can absorb those chemicals.

“Protect Mill Canyon Watershed,” is a citizens’ committee formed to prevent the application of municipal sewage sludge on this grain field. This field sits atop a canyon from which the sludge can run off to organic farms below. The toxic sludge can also contaminate the shared aquifer. Even the process of spreading it can result in drift to unintended places.

Mill Canyon, 35 miles west of Spokane, is home to many commercial and amateur farms and gardens, some of which have been tended organically for over 50 years. Concerns also include effects on neighboring land and drinking water, as well as the unpredictability of drift through air and through seasonal flooding.

Much of the Rosman farmland bordering the canyon and its waterways is classified by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service as Highly Erodible Land (HEL), a clear indicator that this is not a place to experiment with sewage waste.

Mill Canyon neighbors are preparing to appeal an unfavorable decision. If the permit is ultimately denied, it will set a Washington State precedent and have national implications. Go to “[Protectmillcanyon.org](http://Protectmillcanyon.org),” to learn more about the organization and how you can help. **For further information, contact Morton Alexander at [mortonalexander@sisna.com](mailto:mortonalexander@sisna.com)**