Since 2017, the Walz family has attempted to build a cattle operation in rural Monona, Iowa that would house more than 11,000 animals and use the resulting manure in various functions. While the original intention was to use the cattle excrement as a source of renewable energy, the current plan aims to apply the manure to property in local townships and counties under the new name, Supreme Beef, LLC. The controversy with this plan stems from the operation’s proposed location near Bloody Run Creek, a protected water source and Outstanding Iowa Water recipient. Opponents of Supreme Beef, LLC’s plan claim that due to the proximity to the stream and the porous bedrock surrounding the area, the cattle operation will pollute Bloody Run Creek and the connected water passages. After evaluating this case, I conclude that the Iowa Department of Natural Resources should not allow Supreme Beef, LLC to operate in the proposed location due to the outweighing safety and environmental risks it poses, the basic rights it jeopardizes, and the values it breaches in our organization.

This decision was made considering Joseph Badaracco’s Four Frameworks of ethical decision making. The first framework states that a decision maker should take a stakeholder approach to examine which parties receive the most good and which stand the most to lose for either case. This is referred to as a “net/net framework” or “utilitarianism”, and is used to determine which decision, “promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people” (Badaracco). The second component claims that a decision should consider whose individual rights will be infringed on after acting on a decision. The third aspect of ethical decision making focuses on the character of the individual making the decision. As Badaracco states in his speech at Harvard Business School, a decision maker should clearly define the values they hold and the ideals they wish to set going forward, and use these as a guide in making a decision. The fourth and final framework takes a “Machiavellian” approach and questions whether a decision, “will
work in the world as it is” (Badaracco). In this particular case, I found the net/net, individual’s rights, and character frameworks to be the most pertinent in making an ethical decision.

I have determined that not allowing Supreme Beef, LLC to build their cattle operation on the proposed site produces the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people under the net/net framework. To reach this position, I evaluated the benefits received by different parties under the hypothetical decision to allow the company to build and operate in Monona. The largest beneficiary of this decision would be the environment near landfills, as the proposed operation would divert, “hundreds of metric tons of material” from local landfills (Eller). Landfills have been prone to generating runoff that pollutes local water supplies with toxins and chemicals, so this would positively affect the health of communities surrounding landfills in eastern Iowa. Another positive recipient in this hypothetical scenario are the farmers of eastern Iowa who would supply the 11,000 cattle with commodities for feeding (Jordan). The demand for local commodities has the potential to jumpstart local economies and have profits reinvested into other regional efforts. These factors would certainly provide some benefits, but the same results could most likely be achieved at a different location.

The second aspect of the Net/Net Framework is to evaluate who the “losers” are in a hypothetical decision to allow Supreme Beef, LLC to build on the proposed Monona site. The most immediate “loser” in this scenario are the families neighboring the proposed site who have listed well pollution, foul odor, air-born disease to animals, and the potential for explosion as legitimate concerns. This hinders these neighbors’ health and way of life and could similarly affect their business through farm animals contracting the noted air-born diseases. Another group almost immediately impacted by this decision are the people who frequent the Bloody Run Creek for recreation and fishing, as Supreme Beef, LLC’s pollution in the water would tarnish its noted
clearness and quality making it impossible for the native trout to reproduce. This consequently taints the ability for locals and tourists to enjoy the water through recreation and fishing. Spook Cave & Campground, a recreation business that relies on the Bloody Run Creek as a water source, would also suffer in this scenario. By polluting this water, the Spook Cave owners would lose the key component of their business, which employs 21 seasonal workers and draws more than 15,000 tourists to the area each year (Eller). This impact would significantly damage the local economy which generates more than $800,000 a year in economic activity from tourism (Eller). After completing this hypothetical test to weigh the consequences of a decision allowing Supreme Beef, LLC to operate in the proposed location, I conclude that the most good is done for the most people in the scenario where they are not allowed to operate.

After examining the rights of individuals in this situation, I believe that allowing Supreme Beef, LLC to operate on the Monona site directly violates Baddaracco’s second framework. While all individuals have the right to form a business in the state of Iowa, individuals’ right to access clean water and live in a clean environment trump those capitalist freedoms. This basic right to clean water is protected by the Iowa State Doctrine, which has guided Iowa law since the state’s inception (Galt). As previously stated, the surrounding porous bedrock poses a significant threat for toxic seepage into the local water supplies and Bloody Run Creek stream. Allowing the Walz family to operate on the proposed site would likely violate the basic rights of neighboring families who rely on in-ground wells as a water source and the rights of Iowa citizens who take advantage of Bloody Run Creek’s pureness for recreational purposes.

Using character analysis to determine our organization’s values, I believe that allowing Supreme Beef, LLC to build on the proposed Monona site violates our core integrity and sets a poor precedent for future proceedings. As representatives of the Iowa Department of Natural
Resources, it is our responsibility to prioritize our state’s natural environment over business efforts while considering the reputation we wish to leave. Every decision the Walz family has made throughout the Walz Energy and Supreme Beef, LLC ventures indicate that they have neglected warnings and have failed to take proper precautions to meet our requirements (Sierra Club). Based on this, I am confident that if we allow them to operate on the proposed site, there will be similar pollution violations in the future. Therefore, I do not feel comfortable allowing this for the sake of our environment and those who rely on it, and believe this decision would compromise the integrity of both myself and this organization. More importantly, allowing Supreme Beef, LLC to operate and likely pollute the Bloody Run Creek puts other Iowa Outstanding Water sources in danger, as this decision would set future precedent that “protected” waters may not be protected if similar business opportunities present themselves.

To explicitly restate my decision, I have determined that we should not allow Supreme Beef, LLC to operate at the proposed location on the basis of creating the most good for the most people while protecting individual rights and upholding our organization’s integrity. A possible counterargument to this decision is that potentially hundreds of metric tons of material will go into local landfills rather than being put back into local farm fields, ultimately generating gas emissions. However, according to the United States EPA, only 1.44% of total greenhouse gas emissions are caused by manure management, so this decision is not a significant factor from a macro perspective (EPA). Another potential flaw with this decision is that not operating on the proposed site will create less demand for commodities produced by eastern Iowa farmers. The demand of crops to feed cattle should not be an issue however, as the damage caused by the August, 2020 Derecho has already set back these commodity suppliers who may not have adequate resources to meet Supreme Beef, LLC’s demand in the near future.
An alternative solution to this problem is to allow Supreme Beef, LLC to build and operate their cattle farm on a different site than the Monona, Bloody Run Creek area. However, many other locations in eastern Iowa are on low-quality bedrock, which still poses the threat of manure pollution in different streams and communities. Another alternative is to allow the Walzes to operate on the proposed site but strictly enforce their compliance with safety standards and implement harsher fines for failing to meet these requirements. This alternative would likely be ineffective, however, since the family has had ample opportunities to comply with DNR regulations and has failed to do so.

In conclusion, I have determined that the Iowa DNR should not allow Supreme Beef, LLC to operate in the Monona area due to the safety and environmental risks that would cause more damage than good, violate individuals’ basic rights, and compromise our organization’s integrity.
**Works Cited**


