



Factory Farm Alert

A NEWSLETTER ON INDUSTRIALIZED MEAT PRODUCTION

Issue I

**** Premiere Issue ****

Thanks for taking a moment to read this newsletter. It was created to educate consumers on issues affecting their food system. Do you really know how your meat is produced? Read on for more.

FACTORY FARM 101

What is a factory farm?

Meat production in the United States has changed dramatically over the past 20 years. Many facilities where livestock are raised today are actually closer to factories, not the idyllic, small family farms most Americans envision. These “factory farms,” also known as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), emphasize high volume and profit with minimal regard for human health, safe food, the environment, humane treatment of animals, and the rural economy. The characteristics of a factory farm vary by animal and region of the country. But the defining characteristic of such farms is that hundreds to thousands of animals (mainly beef cattle, dairy cows, pigs, chickens or turkeys) are confined tightly together and provided little access to sunlight, fresh air or room for natural movement. They are also characterized by manure “lagoons” or liquid waste systems. Some facilities produce millions of animals annually. Factory farms can be family farms, family-owned corporations, or non-family corporations.

Why do factory farms exist?

Many factors have led to the growth of factory farms in the U.S. Some producers (those who raise the animals) simply want to make the most profit possible, regardless of consequences. Yet many smaller-scale farmers turn to larger operations after struggling financially. Although there is contention over this point, the USDA

states that, on average, large farms have lower production costs than medium and small farms. Regardless, factory farms are rarely penalized for their breaches of environmental laws, and thus do not pay for their true operational costs.

As concentration in the livestock industry increases (when a few companies process and sell the majority of the meat on the market), price and options for the smaller producer and other buyers decreases. Some government financial incentives encourage greater scale and concentration of livestock operations through subsidies that promote overproduction of grain (that then becomes animal feed) and programs that favor factory farms, such as funding for expensive technologies to treat manure. All of this leads desperate farmers to increase the size of their operation (and often their debt) in hopes of keeping their farm. This historic crisis is still going on- low prices and debt lead farmers to follow the agribusiness adage to “get big or get out.”

THE PLAYERS

The top four U.S. beefpacking companies accounted for **83.5%** percent of steer and heifer slaughter in 2000, an 11% increase over 1990 levels.

Tyson (formerly IBP Inc.)
Cargill (Excel)
Swift & Co. (46% owned by ConAgra)
National Beef Packing Company

Source: Cattle Buyer's Weekly: Steer & Heifer Slaughter reported in *Feedstuffs* 6/13/03

What are the problems with factory farms?

Water Quality: Livestock collectively generate 130 times more waste in the U.S. than humans.¹ High numbers of animals on a small area of land creates excess manure; factory farms' manure “lagoons” often leak and foul both surface and groundwater. In

one infamous example, in 1995 a North Carolina hog facility spilled 25 million gallons of manure into the New River- more than twice the amount of oil spilled by the Exxon Valdez- killing 10 million fish and contaminating 350,000 acres of coastal shellfish habitat.² This led North Carolina to impose a statewide moratorium on new factory farms in 1997. Manure runoff can also lead to outbreaks of pathogens, such as *Pfisteria* in Maryland, and dead zones in water bodies like the Gulf of Mexico. This runoff can contaminate drinking sources, sometimes with deadly *E.coli*, increasing costs to communities for drinking water treatments.

Public Health Impacts: The public health impacts from factory farms are so significant, the American Public Health Association (APHA) called for a moratorium on new factory farms in 2003.³



Source: Richey, U.FL

Antibiotic Resistance:

Because so many animals are packed together in stressful conditions, factory farms feed antibiotics to all animals to prevent disease and promote growth. More than 70 percent of antibiotics used in the U.S. are fed to livestock.⁴ According to APHA, the emerging scientific consensus is that antibiotics given to livestock contribute to antibiotic resistance in humans by creating bacteria immune to some antibiotics or “superbugs.”

Air emissions: Manure lagoons release more than 400 volatile chemicals, including ammonia and hydrogen sulfide, which can cause seizures, brain damage, or death. There is now extensive literature documenting acute and chronic respiratory diseases among factory farm workers. Even neighbors of factory farms have suffered severe consequences from farm emissions. A *New York Times* article profiled Robert

Thornell of Ohio, who has brain damage that doctors attribute to the fumes of a nearby industrial hog farm. Forced from his home, Thornell notes "I feel like collateral damage," with his wife asserting that their devastation is "the price we pay for cheap food." Additionally, the horrific stench of these facilities devastates quality of life in these communities.

Factory Farms in the U.S.

Type of Animals	# of Animals	# of Factory Farms
Cattle	26,840,000	106,080
Dairy Cows	9,100,000	116,870
Hogs	56,740,000	117,880
Chickens	2,690,950,000	110,030
Turkeys	112,800,000	13,720

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Impact on Rural Life and Family Farms

Factory farms crowd out small-scale farms in every sector of U.S. livestock farming. Currently, 54 percent of U.S. livestock are produced on five percent of livestock farms. From 1982 to 1997, the number of livestock farms fell from 435,000 to 213,000, with the decline occurring in the very small and small farm sectors. During that same time period, the number of CAFOs doubled from 5,000 to 11,200 or from 1 to 5 percent of all operations.⁵ This transition to factory farms is bad for rural economies because such facilities have few workers and create hardly any jobs.

The growth of factory farms negatively impact rural communities nationwide. As far back as 1983, a paper for the Office of Technology Assessment of the U.S. Congress concluded, "As farm size and absentee ownership increase, social conditions in the local community deteriorate."⁶

Now, corporations that own or control the factory farm may also own the feed company, slaughterhouse, and final stages of production (referred to as "vertical integration"). Many once-independent farmers have become "contract growers," in which a remote corporation controls raising the animals, and the farmer is left with the risk of the operation, such as debt and the cost

of waste disposal. These practices reduce the opportunity for independent producers to sell their product on a competitive and fair market.

Legislation on factory farms

A couple steps forward:

A number of counties and states, spurred on by outraged neighbors and small family farmers, have taken action to stop the spread of factory farms. Nine states passed laws restricting corporate control over farming operations during the 1970s and '80s. Nebraska even went so far as to amend their Constitution to prohibit such ownership. Minnesota has instituted pollution standards aimed at factory farms. And this December in Oregon, citizen pressure led state officials to require public hearings on new factory farms, and make previously secret documents on livestock facilities available to the public.

The majority of recent positive factory farm legislation has occurred on the local level. In southern Idaho, for example, where dairy cow populations soared in the past decade, Gooding County instituted a temporary ban on new dairies in March 2005.

A couple steps back:

Under pressure from big agribusiness, several states are trying to reduce local control and access to information about factory farms. In Minnesota, Governor Pawlenty is leading just such an industry-backed movement, and a similar initiative was barely defeated this year in Missouri. In Idaho, state lawmakers voted in February 2005 to maintain a law allowing only people living within a mile of a factory farm to speak at public hearings. And in Texas, proposed legislation would make it tougher for citizens to file environmental complaints against factory farms.

The next big move:

Factory farms' serious problems require decisive action on the federal level, in addition to the important fights other groups are undertaking locally. Therefore, **Public Citizen and Global Resource Action Center for the Environment (GRACE-www.factoryfarm.org) are calling for a national moratorium on the construction of new and expanding factory farms.** We know this is going to be a long fight and we need your help!

What You Can Do:

Citizen Action:

Please send a letter to your U.S. Senators &

Representatives expressing your support for a ban on new and expanding factory farms at:

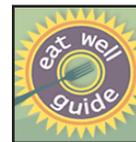
<http://www.citizen.org/cmep/banletter>



Consumer Action:

<http://www.eatwellguide.com/>

The Eat Well Guide is a free directory to find local sustainably-raised meat, poultry, dairy and eggs in stores, farms and restaurants. Enter your zip code to find products that support family farms and are healthful, humane, & environmentally-friendly.



Silver Linings

In response to consumer concerns ranging from health to environmental quality to family farm protection, over the last decade the organic market has grown 20% annually in the United States. Organic food now accounts for 1-2% of the total food sales in the U.S. While only about .2 percent of all pastureland was certified organic in 2001, this represents about 1 million organic acres in pasture. According to the Organic Trade Association, \$75 million worth of organic meat products was sold in 2003.

Citations:

¹ Minority Staff of the U.S. Senate on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, *Animal Waste Pollution in America: An Emerging National Problem*, Washington, DC (December 1997), p. 1

² Williams, Ted. "Assembly Line Swine," *Audubon Magazine*, (March-April 1998), p. 28.

³ "Precautionary Moratorium on New Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations." American Public Health Association, 2003 Policy Statements. 2003. <http://www.apha.org/legislative/policy/2003/2003-007.pdf>

⁴ Mellon M, Benbrook C, Benbrook KL. Hogging It! Estimates of Antimicrobial Abuse in Livestock. Union of Concerned Scientists: Cambridge, MA, January, 2001. Available at <http://www.ucusa.org/publications>.

⁵ Gollehon N, Caswell M, Ribaldo M, Kellogg R, Lander C, Letson D (June 2001), "Confined Animal Production and Manure Nutrients", Economic Research Service, USDA Agricultural Information Bulletin No. 771, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib771>

⁶ MacCannell, D. (1983). "Agribusiness and the Small Community." Background paper to "Technology, Public Policy and the Changing Structure of American Agriculture." U.S. Office of Technology Assessment