

Aggressive New Dairy Group Delivers 'Call to Arms'

Small family farms are disappearing at an alarming rate, and the loss of every small farm means the loss of an individual's or family's independence and pride, along with further erosion of a rural community. Although the Dairy Business Association presumably recognizes this, it fails to articulate an approach that will maintain Wisconsin's position in the national dairy market while promoting our rural communities.

The reality is that the mega farms (farms with 10,000+ cows) in California surpass our milk production. The reaction in Wisconsin has been just that, reactionary rather than visionary. Policy makers and farmers are trying to mimic our competition and expand large feedlot operations. This is not a long term solution. We will not be able to compete with dairies in California on the basis of size. California dairies are located in the Central Valley, an arid desert that is largely unpopulated and has long been dominated by largescale agriculture. Wisconsin's numerous lakes and rivers, combined with its distribution of people throughout rural areas will not allow for this type of expansion without excessive social, environmental, and ultimately, economic costs.

In order for dairy farms and rural communities to survive they must have the tools to effectively compete in the dairy market while maintaining rural communities and the environment. This calls for creativity, innovation, and a willingness to do things differently.

There is a direct link between a thriving small family farm-based economy and the quality of life in rural communities. Communities comprised of smaller farms have a higher quality of life for residents, superior public services, higher rates of social and political participation, less social stratification or inequity, lower poverty rates, less environmental degradation, and a more diverse and stable business sector. Conversely, a rural economy that is increasingly dominated by corporate and mega-sized farms leads to population decline, fewer community services, less local retail trade, and environmental pollution.

We are at the point where we, as a community, need to make crucial decisions about the future of agriculture in Wisconsin. I urge leaders in the agricultural community to take a visionary rather than reactionary approach to find a solution that benefits farmers and the larger community.

By: Melissa K. Scanlan
Legal Director
Midwest Environmental Advocates