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Op-Ed Article

Large Family Dairy Farms: The Facts

There is a public misperception about large family dairy farms in Northwest Ohio. An article on March 20 in *The Blade*, "Citizens Protest Large Dairy Farm," reported on a small protest that occurred at Manders Dairy in Weston, Ohio. Vreba-Hoff Dairy Development, which helped develop the dairy farm, respects the rights of individuals to voice opinions on matters they feel are important. Likewise, we feel there are a few facts related to dairy farms and the dairy industry that are important to express.

First of all, the article quoted a protestor stating, "I like family farms, and I want space, not smells." Perhaps the protestors were not aware that Manders Dairy is a family farm operated by brothers Hein and Walter Manders. In actuality, of dairies located in the United States with over 200 cows, 99% of those are family owned. The Manders brothers also live near the dairy and have a vested personal interest in minimizing odors and protecting the area's environmental resources.

Like other progressive businesses, Manders Dairy is designed to create profitability for the long-term. In order to do this, the cows must be well-cared for and live in a comfortable environment. Manders Dairy houses their cows in a freestall barn which allows the cows to move around freely and eat as frequently as the animal desires. Cow stalls are also bedded with sand to keep the cows cleaner and drier than straw or grass and thus further enhance the animal's comfort - - - far from a "factory setting" implied by the protestors.

In response to the concerns about water quality, it is important to realize clean water is a key factor in the success of a dairy operation. Simply put, the cows need clean water to produce quality milk. Therefore, the dairy farmer is focused on maintaining water quality and is as concerned about water quality as the dairy's surrounding neighbors.

Large dairies also contribute significantly to the economy of Ohio. The total economic impact of milk production and processing has been estimated at over \$4.5 billion per year in Ohio. This activity generates an estimated \$400 to \$500 million per year in taxation. While the national dairy market expanded by 40% over the last 30 years, the milk production in Ohio has remained stagnant. Development of new dairy operations, such as Manders Dairy, can help attract milk processors to Ohio as well as maintain the infrastructure of veterinarians and feed suppliers needed for farms of all sizes.



The bottom line is clear: dairy farms of all sizes are vital to our economy. The survival of smaller dairy farms depends in part on the ability of the large family dairy farms to contribute to the economic base of Northwest Ohio by buying equipment locally and selling milk to processors, which leads to job creation and an increase in tax revenue.

To rebut another popular criticism about large family dairy farms, no documented proof exists that large dairy farms reduce property values. Vreba-Hoff has observed new home construction within a mile of large dairy operations.

Thank you for this opportunity to share this information with you. I encourage your readers to evaluate the facts regarding new dairy operations prior to forming an opinion.

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