The Urgent Case for a Moratorium on Factory Farms in Oregon

Oregon is home to some of the largest mega-dairies in the U.S. as well as dozens of beef feedlots. The state's lax regulations have put a target on its back, and new factory farms are being proposed each year, including contract chicken operations. These factory farms pollute Oregon's air and water — disproportionately impacting environmental justice communities — while driving family-scale farmers out of business. Oregon residents and family farmers are fed up and are urging state leaders to say "enough is enough" by putting a moratorium on new and expanding factory farms.

PROBLEM 1:
Factory Farms Fuel Climate Change

Unlike pasture-based farming, where animals forage for food, factory farms confine animals in crowded buildings. These farms often purchase feed, the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from the livestock industry.[1] They also create enormous amounts of waste. Liquid manure storage (common on mega-dairies) encourages the release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. In contrast, grazing cattle deposit their manure in fields, which decomposes in a way that releases little-to-no methane.[2]

Oregon's mega-dairies alone spew more than 17 million kilograms of planet-warming methane gas every year — equivalent to the emissions from driving over 300,000 cars.[3] Factory cattle and chicken operations emit additional

hazardous pollutants and odors that make life miserable for nearby residents. A single broiler chicken operation can emit up to 24 tons of ammonia (a respiratory irritant) every year.[4]

PROBLEM 2: Water Impacts and Environmental Injustice

Factory farms spread untreated manure on fields. Runoff from poultry and cattle manure can leach toxic pollutants into the soil and water, including nitrate, which is linked to cancer and the life-threatening "blue baby syndrome." Oregon officials identified the Lower Umatilla Basin (home to multiple mega-dairies) as having dangerously elevated nitrate levels.[5] Many communities near Oregon's factory farms are rural and predominantly Latinx — making this pollution an environmental justice issue.[6]

In addition to leaching, catastrophic manure spills can and do happen. In 2019, more than 300,000 gallons of manure from an anaerobic digester spilled near Tillamook Bay.[7] Factory farms also suck up Oregon's dwindling water supplies. Oregon's 11 mega-dairies consume 8.2 million gallons of water every day just to wash and hydrate cows — enough to meet the needs of 124,000 Oregonians.[8]

PROBLEM 3: Threat to Family Farms

Despite these documented risks, Oregon regulators have continued to grant permits to new and expanding factory farms. Meanwhile, family-scale farms are collapsing. Decades of declining farm income hit smaller farms the hardest. They face the pressure to "get big or get out" — expand their farms and adopt the factory farm model, or leave farming altogether.[9] From 1997 to 2017, the number of Oregon's beef farms with fewer than 500 cows fell by 25 percent, and the number of dairy farms with fewer than 500 cows fell 50 percent.[10] The emergence of mega-dairies like Threemile Canyon Farms (which confines around 70,000 cows) coincided with a sharp decline in family-scale dairies, with Oregon losing an average of nine each month between 2002 and 2007.[11]

Family-scale chicken farmers see the writing on the wall and are fighting back against proposed Foster Farms contract operations, including one near Scio that would raise 3.5 million birds and generate 4,500 tons of manure annually. Nearby farmers know that these factory farms will pollute their air and water and threaten their livelihoods.[12]

OREGON OFFICIALS: Enact a Moratorium on Factory Farms Now!

Factory farms are destroying the climate, fouling Oregon's water and air, and driving family-scale farms out of business. Oregon officials must act quickly to enact a moratorium on new and expanding factory farms.

Endnotes

1 Gerber, P. J. et al. (2013). *Tackling Climate Change Through Livestock: A Global Assessment of Emissions and Mitigation Opportunities.* Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations at xii.

2 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks, 1990-2020." EPA 430-R-22-003. April 2022 at 5-11.

3 For methodology, see Food & Water Watch (FWW). "Oregon's Mega-Dairies, Mega-Pollution and Mega-Climate Consequences." 2022.

4 Environmental Integrity Project. "Ammonia Emissions From Broiler Operations Higher Than Previously Thought." December 2017 at 15 to 16.

5 Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Committee. Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. "Second Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area Local Action Plan." October 28, 2020 at 2 and 14.

6 Gittelson, Phoebe et al. "The false promises of biogas: Why biogas is an environmental justice issue." *Environmental Justice*. May 2021 at 2.

7 Kavanaugh, Shane Dixon. "Manure spill splashes 300,000 gallons near Tillamook Bay." *Oregonian*. July 23, 2019; Dorsey, Hilary. "Massive manure spill in Tillamook Bay." *Tillamook Headlight Herald*. Updated July 25, 2019

8 For methodology, see FWW. "Oregon's Mega-Dairies, Mega-Pollution and Mega-Climate Consequences." 2022.

9 Sharma, Shefali. Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. "Milking the Planet: How Big Dairy Is Heating Up the Planet and Hollowing Rural Communities." June 2020 at 10 to 11.

10 FWW analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Quick Stats. Accessed June 2022. Available at https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov.

11 FWW analysis of Oregon Department of Agriculture. "OR AFO Spreadsheet 2021;" FWW analysis of USDA NASS. Quick Stats. Accessed June 2022.

12 Parks, Bradley W. "How huge chicken facilities could affect farming east of Salem." *OPB*. December 19, 2022.

FOOD & WATER WATCH

FOODANDWATERWATCH.ORG

info@fwwatch.org

202.683.2500 (DC) • 510.922.0720 (CA)