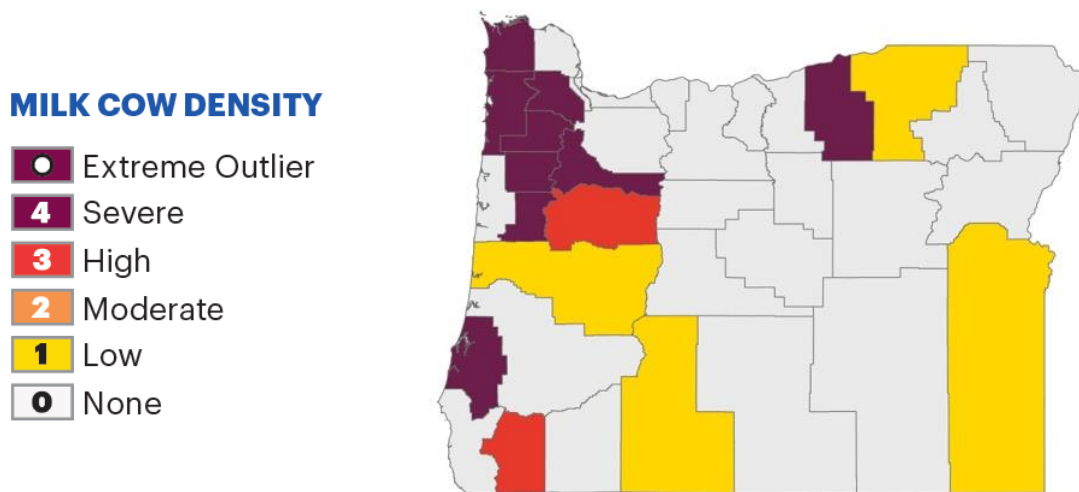


Factory Farm Nation: Oregon's Mega-Dairy Problem

Oregon is raising more animals on factory farms than just five years earlier, producing unprecedented amounts of manure waste. This manure is typically not treated before being dumped into the environment, where it fouls rivers and streams, pollutes drinking water, and fuels climate change.

Meanwhile, state and federal policies and incentives continue to prop up Big Ag's factory farm model at the expense of family-scale operations, which are collapsing in alarming numbers. Oregon must ban new factory farms and the expansion of existing ones, and revamp farm policies to build a food system that works for everyone.

Milk Cows on Oregon's Mega-Dairies



Source: Food & Water Watch analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture

Oregon's Factory Farms Harm the Environment and Rural Communities

In 2022, Oregon had 98,023 milk cows living on mega-dairies (those with 500-plus head).¹ This is 60 percent more than in 2002. Over that same time, the average mega-dairy grew in size, and now houses over 2,000 cows — although the largest mega-dairies can confine tens of thousands.²

Altogether, Oregon's mega-dairies produced over 4 billion pounds of manure in 2022. This is equivalent to two-thirds of the human sewage produced by the entire state. It is enough manure to overflow 2.5 Olympic-sized swimming pools *each day*.

Oregon is also raising more beef cattle on fewer factory feedlots, as feedlot size expands. The total cattle on factory feedlots nearly doubled from 2002 to 2022. The average beef factory feedlot now confines over 13,000 head. In 2022, beef cattle on Oregon's factory feedlots produced over 3 billion pounds of manure — equivalent to the sewage waste produced by half of Oregon's human population.

Untreated manure is often spread on farmland, and surplus manure can create runoff that pollutes soil and water.³ Moreover, manure management practices like liquid storage (common on mega-dairies) can release significant amounts of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.⁴ Factory farms release additional hazardous pollutants like ammonia and nitrogen oxides that worsen air quality for nearby residents. These factory farms have long been disproportionately located in low-income and non-white areas, creating an environmental justice crisis.⁵ In addition to these health hazards, residents near mega-dairies and other factory farms report foul odors and flies that keep them from enjoying the outdoors or even opening their windows.⁶

Oregon Is Bleeding Family-Scale Dairies

Nowhere is the shift from family-scale to factory operations more apparent than in the dairy industry, where consolidation occurred at a faster pace than in almost every other agricultural sector.⁷ Smaller, family-scale farms are struggling to survive. Oregon had fewer than half as many family-scale dairies in 2022 compared to 2002, and one-fifth fewer in 2022 compared to just 2017. The loss of family-scale farms harms rural communities, with the rise in factory farms linked to a host of social and economic declines, from higher poverty rates to out-migration.⁸

We Can Fix Our Factory Farm Problem

We need a complete overhaul of our federal farm policies so that they work for farmers and consumers — not agribusiness giants — while reducing livestock's climate footprint. This must include:

- An immediate, national ban on new factory farms and on the expansion of existing ones;
- Research and funding to help current factory farms transition to smaller, more sustainable crop and/or livestock systems; and
- Investment to expand local markets and build the infrastructure needed to help farmers bring their products to market.

While we work toward these goals, Oregon must protect the progress we have made to strengthen protections for local communities and water quality.⁹ Moreover, Oregon must take immediate action to further protect family-scale farms, rural communities, and our climate by enacting a moratorium on new and expanding factory farms.

Endnotes

- 1 For methodology, see Food & Water Watch (FWW). "Factory Farm Nation: 2024 Edition." September 2024.
- 2 Oregon Department of Agriculture. "OR AFO Spreadsheet 2021." 2021. On file with FWW.
- 3 Graham, Jay P. and Keeve E. Nachman. "Managing waste from confined animal feeding operations in the United States: The need for sanitary reform." *Journal of Water and Health*. Vol. 8, No. 4. December 2010 at 649 to 651 and 654; Yang, Qichun et al. "Spatiotemporal patterns of livestock manure nutrient production in the conterminous United States from 1930 to 2012." *Science of the Total Environment*. October 2015 at 14 to 20.
- 4 See FWW. "Factory Farms, Fracking, and the Methane Emergency." July 2024.
- 5 Katz, Jamie et al. "Leadership Council for Justice and Accountability, Central Valley Defenders for Clean Water & Air, Animal Legal Defense Fund, and Food & Water Watch Comments on Proposed Amendments to the Low Carbon Fuel Standard." Submitted to the California Air Resources Board. February 20, 2023 at 2 to 4. Available at https://www.arb.ca.gov/lispub/comm/iframe_bccomdisp.php?listname=lcfs2024&comment_num=7060&virt_num=
- 6 *Ibid.* at 7; Weida, William J. The Colorado College. "A synopsis of potential impacts from dairies on a regional economy." March 2003 at 1 to 2; Border 2012 Texas-New Mexico-Chihuahua Regional Work Group Public Meeting. Minutes. Anthony, New Mexico. November 4, 2010 at 2 to 3.
- 7 MacDonald, James M. et al. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. "Consolidation in U.S. Dairy Farming." Economic Research Report No. 274. July 2020 at 11.
- 8 Lobao, Linda and Curtis W. Stofferahn. "The community effects of industrialized farming: Social science research and challenges to corporate farming laws." *Agriculture and Human Values*. Vol. 25, Iss. 2. June 2008 at 220 to 221 and 225; Durrenberger, E. Paul and Kendall M. Thu. "The expansion of large scale hog farming in Iowa: The applicability of Goldschmidt's findings fifty years later." *Human Organization*. Vol. 55, No. 4. Winter 1996 at 411 to 412; Lyson, Thomas A. and Rick Welsh. "Agricultural industrialization, anticorporate farming laws, and rural community welfare." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*. Vol. 37, Iss. 8. August 1, 2005 at 1487 to 1488.
- 9 FWW. [Press release]. "OR governor signs first reform of industrial factory farm regulation in decades." July 31, 2023.