

The Urgent Case for a Moratorium on Factory Farms in New Mexico

Factory farms took over the New Mexican landscape over the past few decades, bringing numerous externalities — from air pollution to contaminated drinking water to environmental injustice. Regulations are failing to curb this pollution. It is time to enact a moratorium on all new factory farms and the expansion of existing ones.

Factory Farms Exacerbate New Mexico's Water Crisis

Over the past 20 years, New Mexico lost about half of its family-scale dairies (those under 500 cows). Meanwhile, mega-dairies^a ballooned, with the average New Mexico mega-dairy today confining more than 3,000 cows.¹ This shift towards larger confinement operations wreaks havoc on New Mexico's environment. Altogether, New Mexico's mega-dairies produce enough manure to overflow nine Olympic swimming pools *each day*. That is 11 times as much sewage produced by the Albuquerque metropolitan area.²

Smaller dairies can sustainably apply manure to surrounding cropland as fertilizer. But many of New Mexico's mega-dairies are “dry-lot” operations, confining cows on barren soil that becomes a “mashed mess of urine and manure.” Excess nutrients can run off into surface water, creating a slew of problems including harmful algal blooms and fish kills. Mega-dairies also pollute groundwater, the source of drinking water for the majority of New Mexicans. Elevated levels of nitrate in drinking water are linked to health problems, including cancer and the life-threatening condition called blue-baby syndrome.³

Factory Farms Are an Environmental Justice Disaster

Factory farms often purchase feed and other inputs outside of the local community while benefitting from tax breaks that deprive local coffers of revenue; they also offload infrastructure, environmental and public health costs onto local communities. Additionally, factory farms can reduce property values of nearby homes. Decades of research uphold that factory farms “are fundamentally incompatible with rural regional economic development,” and are linked to higher levels of unemployment and poverty.⁴

On top of this, fenceline communities bear the brunt of factory farm pollution. Flies and foul odors prevent residents from spending time outdoors or even opening their windows.⁵ The odors are not just a nuisance, but a mix of toxic pollutants that contribute to health issues including headaches,

^a In this piece, mega-dairies refer to operations with 500 or more cows.

fatigue and asthma.⁶ Factory farms also emit greenhouse gases, like methane and nitrous oxide, that fuel the climate crisis.⁷ Many of these fence-line communities are low-income areas and/or communities of color, making factory farms an environmental justice issue.⁸

It Is Time for a Moratorium on Factory Farms

State regulations requiring manure lagoon liners and quarterly monitoring⁹ have failed to stop water pollution. New Mexican communities, family farmers, confined animals, and the environment cannot endure any more factory farms. State officials must act quickly to enact a moratorium on new and expanding factory farms.

Endnotes

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- 1 Food & Water Watch analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture. National Agricultural Statistics Service. Available at <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>. Accessed August 2019.
 - 2 *Ibid.*
 - 3 Wang, Jingjing and Janak Raj Joshi. University of New Mexico. "Policy Alternatives for Controlling Nitrate Pollution from New Mexico's Dairies." New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute. Report No. 369. June 2015 at 3 to 4; Broud, Mike. Kansas State University. "Where do cows live? The strategy behind dairy barns." Dairy Management, Inc. February 21, 2018; Sorrentino, Joseph. "Which milk: Practices on New Mexico's conventional dairies are hard to swallow." *Santa Fe Reporter*. December 16, 2014.
 - 4 Weida, William J. The Colorado College. "A synopsis of potential impacts from dairies on a regional economy." March 1, 2003 at 2; 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.
 - 5 Weida (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.
 - 6 Schultz, Amy A. et al. "Residential proximity to concentrated animal feeding operations and allergic and respiratory disease." *Environment International*. Vol. 130. September 2019 at 1; Von Essen, Susanna G., and Brent W. Auvermann. "Health effects from breathing air near CAFOs for feeder cattle or hogs." *Journal of Agromedicine*. Vol. 10, No. 4. 2005 at 59; Wing, Steve and Susanne Wolf. "Intensive livestock operations, health, and quality of life among eastern North Carolina residents." *Environmental Health Perspectives*. Vol. 108, No. 3. March 2000 at 233 to 235 and 237.
 - 7 Gerber, P.J. et al. (2013). *Tackling Climate Change Through Livestock: A Global Assessment of Emissions and Mitigation Opportunities*. Rome: FAO at xii and 20.
 - 8 Border 2012 Texas-New Mexico-Chihuahua Regional Work Group Public Meeting (2010) at 2 to 3.
 - 9 New Mexico Administration Code § 20.6.6 (2011).