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Dairy

Darigold plans to build \$450M facility in Washington

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

PASCO, Wash. — Darigold plans to build a \$450 million dairy processing plant in Pasco, Wash.

The plant will produce a new specialized protein powder and butter at what the company and Port of Pasco officials are touting as “the most sophisticated large-scale milk protein facility in North America.”

“It’s great news for ag and all of Washington State, keeping a processing plant of this size and scope,” Randy Hayden, executive director of the port, told the Capital Press. “(It) will support not just the manufacturing jobs at the plant — all of the jobs at the farms and transportation industry. It’s great to have these facilities here supporting our farmers.”

“It’s a deeper commitment from the state’s largest co-op to dairy in Washington state,” said Dan Wood, executive director of the state Dairy Federation. “A couple hundred direct jobs,

another thousand support jobs, which is major economic development. It just underscores how important dairy is to the state economy.”

Port commissioners approved the sale of roughly 150 acres of the Reimann Industrial Center to Darigold during a special commission meeting July 1.

Darigold intends to bring the new facility online in the fall of 2023, according to a port press release.

Darigold expects to process up to 8 million pounds of milk per day in the new facility, said Taffine Laylin, leader of sustainability communications and social engagement for the company. The operation will produce specialized products that can’t be made in any of the company’s other plants.

More than 50% of the facility’s finished product is intended for export, with an emphasis on the Pacific Rim.

Darigold will deploy anaerobic digestion technology as part of the on-site wastewater treatment strategy and use the extracted methane as

a natural gas substitute, reducing fossil fuel use, according to a company press release. This will be complemented by machinery that enables heat and energy recovery and reuse.

In addition, the new infrastructure is designed to accommodate future electric vehicles, including a potential conversion of Darigold’s large fleet of semi-trucks — further reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation, the company says.

Darigold has been working with the port since last fall as part of its extensive Pacific Northwest search for the right location for its new facility. Darigold officials predict the capital investment will be between \$450 million and \$500 million.

The new plant “is expected to accelerate our farmer-owned cooperative’s goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050, cementing a longstanding tradition of continuous stewardship and sustainability improvements,” said Stan Ryan, president and CEO of Darigold, in the press release.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A Washington appeals court ruled June 29 that the state’s manure storage and spreading rules are too weak to protect water quality.

Washington court hands dairies a loss

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington’s rules for storing and spreading manure on dairies are too lax to protect water and the Department of Ecology must rewrite them, the Court of Appeals Division II in Tacoma said June 29.

The three-judge panel sent the regulations, contained in permits issued to dairies and other confined animal feeding operations, back to Ecology.

It was unclear how the ruling would affect Ecology’s timeline for updating the rules, which are due to expire in March 2022.

Ecology already is working on a new CAFO permit and may have a draft proposal soon. An Ecology spokeswoman said the department was reviewing the decision and considering its next step.

Ecology issued the CAFO permit in 2017 after lengthy discussions with the dairy industry and environmental groups. The regulations didn’t entirely satisfy either group, and both sides appealed aspects of the permit.

The appeals were merged into one case. The court

handed the coalition of environmental groups, led by the Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, a nearly total victory.

The court did reject claims by the environmental groups that manure lagoons should have synthetic liners and leak-detection systems. The judges agreed with Ecology and the dairy industry that synthetic liners would be too expensive.

The court, however, said the permits failed to set deadlines for repairing lagoons that were at risk of leaking nitrates into groundwater. High levels of nitrates are a health risk, especially for infants and unborn children.

The court also said farmers should be required to monitor water quality. Ecology had argued that testing soils and other conditions in the permit were sufficient. Monitoring wells was impractical and didn’t prevent pollution, according to Ecology.

The court also faulted Ecology for not considering the effects of climate change in writing the regulations.

Washington State Dairy Federation director Dan Wood said dairies look forward to talking about the industry’s efficient use of land and water.

“Dairy farmers have a remarkable story to tell with regard to environmental improvements and addressing climate change,” he said.

The judges also said pollution-prevention plans written by individual dairies should be subjected to public comment.

The court rejected the one appeal brought by the Dairy Federation and Washington Farm Bureau.

The farm groups argued that a formula developed in the United Kingdom for determining when crops were ready to take up manure nutrients in the spring would stunt crops in Eastern Washington.

The court ruled that crop growth wasn’t the point and that there wasn’t any evidence the formula would not protect groundwater.

The permit, wrote Judge Anne Cruser, “does not require promotion of the greatest crop yields.”

The court didn’t take into account climate differences between Eastern and Western Washington, Wood said.

“We’ll continue to work with Ecology to help them understand that there are two distinct climate areas in our state and that standards must be developed for each...,” Wood said.

Judges Linda Lee and Lisa Sutton concurred in the opinion.

Washington has approximately 300 dairies. Dairies and other CAFOs are not required to obtain permits, but the permits provide some protection from fines and lawsuits. Any operation that confines livestock to an enclosed area for 45 days in a year meets the definition of a CAFO.

The other environmental groups involved in the appeal are the Sierra Club, Waterkeeper Alliance, Center for Food Safety, Friends of Toppenish Creek and Community Association for the Restoration of the Environment.

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