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Our View

Regulating that dairy air

Forgive the inner 12-year-old in us that can't help but let out a sophomore chuckle each time we discuss the prospects of the government regulating dairy air emissions.

We do not take lightly the prospects of increased regulations and the impacts they would have on dairy farm families, including a new proposal targeting Oregon dairies.

A coalition of 22 environmental, public health and animal welfare groups has petitioned Oregon regulators to adopt new rules targeting air pollution from large-scale dairies.

The petition, filed Aug. 17 with the state Environmental Quality Commission, seeks to create a dairy air emissions program that would apply to farms with 700 or more mature cows, which the federal Environmental Protection Agency defines as a "large" operation.

Petitioners want to require proposed and existing dairies to obtain an air quality permit and curb harm-



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

An Oregon petition seeks to regulate emissions from dairies with more than 700 mature cows.

ful emissions — including ammonia, methane, hydrogen sulfide and particulate matter, among others.

They argue that while the state regulates manure it ignores potential air pollutants on dairies.

"For too long, the state has sat idly by while Oregon mega-dairies have been spewing toxic pollution into the air, wreaking havoc on our natural resources, climate and communities," Emily Miller, staff attorney for Food and Water Watch and the petition's lead author. "This head-in-the-sand approach must change."

A state-convened Dairy Air Quality Task Force in 2008 recommended a dairy air emissions program. In 2017, legislation designed to enshrine those recommendations into law failed to move from committee.

In our experience, the Democrat-controlled legislature has never been reluctant to regulate agriculture. There must be a reason this idea hasn't gained traction in Salem.

Perhaps because it's not a pressing need.

Farm interests argue that Oregon producers have made great strides voluntarily reducing dairy emissions since the task force made its recommendations. A whole host of new technologies and best practices have improved air quality and reduced odors associated with big dairies.

They also note that by the Environmental Protection Agency's measure the state does not have an air quality problem.

As is always the case, petitioners target only "large" dairies with 700 or more cows to be regulated. These are

the infamous "mega-dairies" and "factory farms" they demonize in their advocacy.

In reality, the vast majority of these "large" dairies are family-owned and -operated farms. The economics of the dairy businesses make it difficult to make a living with a small herd.

"You cannot support a family on a couple hundred milk cows," Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of public policy for the Oregon Farm Bureau, said. "Their costs already exceed what they're getting on the market for their product."

It wouldn't take long for smaller dairies to be swept up in a state regulatory scheme, because these things rarely stay blind to scale.

The other economic reality is that the more regulations you heap on the dairy industry, the larger the farms will get. Only the very large can afford to meet expensive requirements.

All joking about the double entendre aside, everyone should be wary of this effort to regulate dairy air emissions.

Our View



Capital Press File

Beef cattle graze in Oregon. A proposal to "rewild" parts of the West would halt grazing on some federal allotments.

'Rewilding' the already wild West

In case you haven't heard, the West needs to be "rewilded."

That means more wolves and beavers and no cattle on about 110,000 square miles of federal land, including many grazing allotments, across 11 states.

First, let's think about the West, which is as wild as any place in the nation. One only needs to take a look at Yellowstone, Yosemite, Glacier and Olympic and dozens of other national parks in the region. Add the many wilderness areas, preserves and open spaces and you'll see what we mean.

Beyond that, wild areas exist in every western state. One does not need the federal government to define where wilderness is.

But 20 academics and environmentalists claim in a recent viewpoint published in *BioScience*, a journal of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, that the West needs to be "rewilded."

Their proposal, dubbed the "Western Wilding Network," is to return those 11 parcels of land to nature. They want to do it by banning cattle and sheep grazing — and any other activities, including mining and oil drilling — from those areas.

As evidence of the need to evict cattle from the selected allotments, they dipped

into their collection of decades-old photos showing the problems poorly managed grazing can cause.

Those photos are compared to newer photos that show what wolves and beavers have done over a couple decades after the cattle left.

One wonders what would have happened if modern grazing management had been tried first.

Such is the nature of the arguments offered in this proposal, which could most generously be described as a think piece.

The authors appear to have started with a conclusion in mind and built their case from there.

For example, they argue that wolves and beavers are good and cattle and sheep are bad. They ignore the problems wolves and beavers can cause and the benefits cattle and sheep provide. This includes reducing fuels that feed wildfires.

As part of their plan, the authors say ranchers who lose their allotments would be paid — presumably a lot, because many operations depend on allotments to remain viable.

But no mention is made of the other ranchers who would be left. When the wolves start wondering across the countryside — and they will — their live-

stock will be at risk. Around the West, we've seen that wolves can cause serious, chronic problems for livestock producers.

Then there's the matter of food, which neither wolves nor beavers provide.

Cattle and sheep graze on allotments, most of which are ill-suited for growing crops and have limited water supplies. The fact that they can graze those landscapes and produce high-quality protein to feed people in the U.S. and around the world is a benefit to all.

Much is made about cattle's alleged contribution to climate change. True enough, cattle produce methane, a greenhouse gas. But methane breaks down over about 10 years. That means the amount of methane produced by cattle stays the same because the population of cattle stays the same, according to Frank Mitloehner of the University of California-Davis, an expert on the relationship between livestock and air quality.

The authors are pitching their Western Rewilding Network as a "bold, scientifically grounded organizing principle" for President Biden's "30 by 30" proposal to conserve 30% of federal land and water by 2030. Biden's plan has no apparent scientific basis other than it sounds good. The Western Rewilding Network, with its many shortcomings, doesn't appear to make up for that.

READERS' VIEW

Some thoughts on 'woke' insects

Wokeism has made another correction in perception.

The title "Murder Hornet" is not only insensitive but "evokes fear and discrimination." It's unclear whether the hornet or its victims are suffering from this oversight.

The title "Ladybug" is also problematic. It does not consider gender nor sexual orientation. It's a noun when it should be a pronoun — he, she or it — or something else to be determined that's more sensitive.

*Michael F. Hanley IV
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Please protect our planet

Two headline articles in the Capital Press recently seriously oppose preservation of Planet Earth.

First, overfeeding of birds (with sunflower seeds), which will lead to crowding and disease.

Then, congratulating wheat grower Michelle Hennings on racing her truck, causing considerable air pollution.

Currently, we need spaced wildlife species and the cleanest air possible to allow plants to survive climate stresses.

Please decide to promote planet protection.

*Vivian Thompson
Morro Bay, Calif.*

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