

Too little too late from dirty dairies



KRISTINA BEGGEN

OTHER VIEWS

When dangerous nitrate levels in Morrow County's drinking water plunged the area into a crisis, Oregon's largest mega-dairy, Threemile Canyon Farms, and its processor, the Tillamook Creamery Association, were quick to step in with offers of financial assistance.

But while their efforts may help with immediate water needs in Boardman, these companies are part of the problem. Waste from dairy and beef cattle like the 69,000 housed at Threemile Canyon's facilities generated a significant amount of the nitrogen that fouled groundwater in the Lower Umatilla Basin.

The only way to truly protect Morrow County's groundwater and aquifers is to address nitrate contamination at its source: mega-dairies and other factory farms.

The Stand Up to Factory Farms coalition urged the EPA more than two years ago to address nitrate levels in Eastern Oregon's Lower Umatilla Basin that were

already exceeding federal and state safety standards. We've known the danger for decades. And in 2015, Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality found nearly half of the groundwater wells sampled had hazardous levels of nitrates. Test wells on Threemile Canyon Farms'

Mega-dairies like Threemile Canyon have been increasingly relying on digesters to greenwash their waste problem and capture methane that can be sold to energy companies as "clean" fuel. But digesters rely on continued use of massive "lagoons" that are prone to leaks and leaching into

to conceal its contract with the disgraced Lost Valley Farms Dairy, which chalked up 200 environmental violations and jeopardized 81 water systems.

Today, Tillamook maintains contracts with Threemile Canyon. Yet earlier in the year, Threemile Canyon faced sharp criticism when it was revealed its onsite digester had been violating Oregon's air quality laws for more than a year even as the company received "green" credits from a California low carbon fuels program.

If Threemile Canyon Farms were serious about helping Eastern Oregonians in this crisis, it would stop threatening drinking water with its dangerous waste management practices. If Tillamook wanted to commit resources to providing fresh water for people, it would stop buying milk from mega-dairies. And if Oregon's lawmakers were serious about safeguarding groundwater and aquifers in this megadrought, they would institute a mega-dairy moratorium and stop these facilities from polluting our climate and water resources.

Kristina Beggen is the lead organizer for the Stand Up to Factory Farms coalition and Food & Water Watch's Oregon campaigns.

“COWS IN THE LOWER UMATILLA BASIN PRODUCED 4.3 BILLION POUNDS OF MANURE IN 2019, 516 TIMES MORE THAN THE WASTE PRODUCED BY THE AREA'S HUMAN POPULATION.”

land have shown nitrate levels above state-established guidelines for health.

Cows in the Lower Umatilla Basin produced 4.3 billion pounds of manure in 2019, 516 times more than the waste produced by the area's human population. And according to Oregon agencies, CAFOs are the largest source of nitrates in the Lower Umatilla Basin.

groundwater. A digester spill in 2019 sent more than 300,000 gallons of manure into the Tillamook River.

Despite an advertising campaign projecting images of pasture-based cows and small farms, Tillamook has a troubled history of partnering with mega-dairies responsible for widespread water and air contamination. The company worked



ANDREW CUTLER

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Optimistic about the future of news

News about my industry isn't good. Recently, the New York Times reported more than 300 newspapers closed across the nation during the coronavirus pandemic. That's about two closures a week. Interestingly enough, more newspapers were predicted to fail than actually did because of the economic hit the pandemic delivered.

So good news, bad news?

Perhaps.

No one that I know of carries a crystal ball that accurately predicts the future (if you do, we need to talk. That would be a good story) so it is hard to tell what the latest industry news means for the long-term. Is it time to panic? Of course not.

There is always a fair amount of hand-wringing and gloom and doom predications when such news is released. The news more than 300 newspapers failed during the pandemic is by no stretch of the imagination positive. In fact, it's dismal. And it should matter to you.

Newspapers and digital, broadcast and radio outlets are crucial to delivering information that matters to Americans. If you, the reader, the voter, can count on information you receive from a news outlet you are better informed. That means you can make more wise decisions regarding who and what you vote for. Americans in every state and every county are far better off with a robust news organization striving to keep us informed.

A good newspaper must be a watchdog of government expenses and policies, yet it also must be a vehicle for showcasing what is good and positive in a community. Those two separate goals often collide. Yet a hard-hitting investigative piece and a feature about a positive community issue can both co-exist inside a newspaper. Once more, they should.

The problems we face as news men and women now is one of perception for many. Our political climate has made such concepts such as "fair" and "balanced" news coverage a zero-sum game, where information is tailored and manufactured by fringe elements who then spin it into the mainstream.

We have to guard against allowing those who seek to always wave the bloody shirt to have more sway than they deserve. Everyone has a right to express an opinion and we should respect all opinions but as Americans, and Oregonians, we need to use a certain degree of common sense as well.

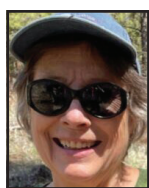
I believe Americans want a reliable news source. That deep down they understand how important it is to have a "fourth estate" that provides an oversight of government and delivers trustful information on a regular basis.

So, while I cringe and worry about the loss of newspapers, I am also optimistic that our industry isn't dead nor will it die. I am optimistic that we can, and do, provide fair and balanced coverage of our local area.

Andrew Cutler is the publisher/editor of the East Oregonian and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the East Oregonian and five more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.



Compromise only goes so far before action needed



RYNDA CLARK



MATHIEU FEDERSPIEL

OTHER VIEWS

Earlier this month, our organizations joined with our allies and went to court to restore protections for large trees in Eastern Oregon. The editors of this paper argued it represented failure on all sides. We agree. To a point.

Anytime we go to court, it is the result of failure. In this case, it was the Forest Service's failure to abide by the law. A fundamental concept of our democracy is that no one — not even the government — is above the law. Regardless of their means, citizens have a right to hold their government accountable.

Our primary concern is for the health of our forests and communities. We support some thinning near communities and appropriate restoration of forests that have been degraded by fire suppression, logging and overgrazing. None of those things require cutting our biggest and oldest trees or logging the backcountry.

When a political appointee signed a decision to undermine decades old protections for our forests, it capped off a politically driven process. It also cut sovereign tribes and the general public off from legally required opportunities to seek a better outcome.

Left with no choice but to allow the illegally amended rule to stand or challenge it in court, we chose to fight for our forests and our rights.

Had the substance of the decision been different, we'd fully expect the logging industry to do the same.

We understand there are other perspectives out there. While we find their rhetoric misleading, we acknowledge the logging industry has a right to free speech and to use their political clout to increase their profits.

The real failure is with the Forest Service, which failed to honor commit-

exceptions to the rules. Sometimes with our support.

When we learned the Trump administration was changing the rules, we were skeptical. Still, we participated in good faith. Just as the editors suggested, we sat down and offered compromises and proposals we thought could lead to a good outcome.

However, those olive branches were brushed aside. During a period of historic conflict and distraction, and under tremendous political pressure, the agency pushed toward a predetermined outcome.

That outcome was opposed by dozens of conservation, climate, Indigenous and public health groups, thousands of citizens, 115 independent scientists, and even former Forest Service leadership.

We played by the rules. The agency did not.

So, when a political appointee ended the process by signing a decision that violated numerous laws, we were left with little choice but to exercise our constitutional rights and stand up to our own government.

We join the editors in wanting to see compromise from all sides and a better path forward. We also agree that Sen. Ron Wyden has a history of bringing folks together as he did with his East Side forest bill years ago.

For that to happen again, protections must be restored, with the goal of working toward a viable solution. We'll be waiting at the table.

Rynda Clark is on the leadership team of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness, which has four active chapters in Oregon. Mathieu Federspiel is on the leadership team of the Juniper Group of the Oregon Sierra Club.

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ments made more than two decades ago.

Supporters of the new rules that allow logging the largest 3% of trees often tell the half-truth that they replaced protections that were meant to be temporary. They don't mention those protections were meant to be temporary until the agency crafted comprehensive rules that would take all interests into account — including those of us who advocate for clean water, wildlife habitat and healthy communities. That never happened.

The agency regularly made