

Ron JOHNSON

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Presentation to The Clean Environment Commission

March 5, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address this commission this afternoon on a very important topic that this community and many others in the province are dependant on.

I would like to speak first as the Plant Manager for Arborg Feeds. Arborg Feeds is one of the 3 feed mills Puratone owns in this province and is located just south of town. Our core business is the processing of hog and poultry feeds for the Interlake region. The mill operates 5 days a week 24 hours a day and employees 16 full time staff.

This mill was purchased from the Loewen family back in the late 1980's and was producing about 7000 tonnes of feed each year. With the expansion of the hog industry along with poultry expansion in the Interlake the mill now produces just under 70,000 tonnes of feed per year. This growth has helped the entire region prosper as the grain industry has consolidated and closed regional elevators while we have increased our feed grain volume purchasing to over 1 million bushels of local feed grains. This has benefited all feed grain producers by increasing their wheat and barley prices.

We run 3 semi trailer feed trucks out of this mill and contract out all the incoming feed grains coming in each day. Each year we are faced with more and more regulations with feed traceability and record keeping and are proud of our track record and the Feed Assure Certification that we have passed for the past 3 years. Feed Assure is a comprehensive feed safety management and certification program that allows feed companies to become certified to HACCP standards.

Over the past 20 years we have upgraded and reinvested in the mill with the largest expansion happening in 2000 when 1.8 million was spent adding a complete new pelleting tower to the mill. We have continued to reinvest approximately \$250,000.00 each year into this facility to make it one of the most automated mills in the province.

Puratone is proud to be a part of this community and have contributed to many of the capital projects in this community including the hall we are meeting in today along with the Assisted Living Complex beside us. We offer scholarships each year in Riverton and Arborg and support all the curling, hockey, and fundraising events in the community.

The hog industry along with manufacturing growth are the reasons this community has grown over the past 10 years to be as successful as it is today.

I would also like to present to you today as President of Paradigm Farms Ltd. This 2800 sow farrow to finish operation was formed by over 50 local area residents throughout the Interlake in the late 1990's. The farms are scattered throughout the Interlake with sites at Petersfield, Narcisse, Skylake and Ledwyn..

All of these sites were granted approval for construction after a lengthy technical review. I have witnessed the frustration and anxiety that comes forward when a municipality has not prepared themselves by being up to date on the technical review process before going into a Conditional Use Hearing. I have also witnessed other municipal councils that have been prepared and knowledgeable handle a Conditional Use Hearing and allow everybody a chance to participate and have the knowledge to answer any fears that arise instead of instilling doubt in the public's eyes. I think it should be mandatory that municipalities have a planning statement with areas clearly marked out for agriculture and intensive livestock and stick to their statement if a project meets all standards. In the past intensive livestock areas have been established where there was the least amount of controversy and opposition.

Air Quality both for our hogs and our neighbors was very important to us when we were looking at ventilation designs and we chose to install chimney ventilation over the traditional side wall vents. We felt that bringing in fresh air under the roof soffits, while exhausting stale air beside the inlet was not the best. Exhausting stale air from the barn up an exhaust chimney not only gives the hogs cleaner air but also seems to dissipate the smell up and away from the farm.

We are very fortunate in the Interlake to have such good quality and plentiful supply of fresh water which is very important to our industry. We monitor our usage daily and are constantly checking the quality as this is so important for raising healthy hogs. All our lagoons were designed by professional engineers and approved by Manitoba Environment prior to being commissioned. Each lagoon had to be built with a holding capacity of 500 days to allow extra surge capacity in the event of a very heavy rainfall in any given year and the inability to get on the farmland to apply this nutrient. This design is the envy of many rural municipalities that are now dealing with lagoon overload caused by lagoons built under capacity for their current needs. Each lagoon was built with a monitoring well system and many were built with a synthetic liner as well. This design will monitor what is happening under the lagoon to ensure our most precious groundwater is not contaminated.

I have witnessed since our operation has started up more and more regulations on manure management and we take the nutrient management of our farms very seriously. We welcome these regulations and have invested in the most state of the art equipment for manure analysis and application. We have been soil testing the spread fields we apply manure on for the past 7 years and been injecting into the soil wherever possible. We have watched over the years as this nutrient has gone from a waste product to a very much sought after commodity with neighbors fighting over who receives it. We have had to mitigate with the neighbors around our farms to assure them they would each be offered manure equally. I have seen hay feeds triple their productivity while still maintaining a low reserve of nitrogen and phosphorous the following year.

In the region serviced by our local commercial fertilizer dealers each year we import into the Arborg area over 2600 tonnes of commercial phosphate fertilizer. Our soil tests around the Arborg area show on average we have a residual phosphorous level of 10 to 15 ppm or 6.25 pounds per acre on average. An average wheat or barley crop will use up 35 pounds per acre with a canola field utilizing up to 50 pounds per acre. At these levels their most certainly is a place for the hog industry in this province.

I have watched over the past few years as many smaller hog producers have quit producing hogs because they could not afford to update their facilities to the new standards without going into a huge amount of debt and the amount of debt that they could afford to take on would make their operation no longer feasible to produce hogs. This reality has forced many local area farmers to pool their resources and build larger facilities that can be state of the art and still feasible to operate. Some other producers in the area have signed long term agreements with larger producers such as Puratone, Hytex and Maple Leaf Nutrition to simply care for their hogs on a price per hog basis with little risk back to themselves. The farms that have been constructed in the past 10 years are built to high standards and most are built with engineered stamps on the construction design along with the lagoons.

Paradigm Farms has filed a Voluntary Environmental Farm Plan and has purchased a Biovator to dispose of mortalities at one of its sites and has composters set up at the other 2 sites to deal with mortalities. The Biovator is a Composting Vessel that Puratone invented and has delivered to the industry to deal with mortalities. This vessel simply composts dead stock along with a carbon source, we use straw, and water to produce a fully environmentally friendly compost which can be reused to speed up the composting cycle or spread as a mulch on the land.

In closing I consider ourselves good stewards of the land and feel that this moratorium is unfairly singling out a small segment of agriculture that may or may not be popular with Manitobans. Please consider the value this industry contributes to our economy in Manitoba both rural and urban.

Sincerely:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ron Johnston', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ron Johnston