

MAR 19 2007

36 Bayview Drive SW
Calgary, Alberta
T2V 3N6
March 6, 2007

EXHIBIT NUMBER: 450B - 002
File Name: Hog Review
Date: MAR 19
Received by: [Signature]
(Commission Secretary)

Manitoba Clean Environment Commission
305- 155 Carlton Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3C 3H8

Dear Commission Members:

Can the residents of Manitoba be assured that this Commission has been given the power and authority, by the Government of Manitoba, to bring about significant and meaningful changes based on your findings that will be in the best interests the majority of Manitobans?

If so, you have an extremely important task at hand. Your group, along with the provincial government, will be remembered in Manitoba's history for setting in motion the future direction of this province. It will not only affect this generation but many more to follow.

We are at a tipping point in this province now. Manitoba is an amazingly unique, bountiful, and young province. It has so much to offer with its abundance of fresh water, fisheries, rich productive farms land, strong resilient people with a wonderful work ethic and a proud heritage. Strong communities made Manitoba what it is.

We are teetering on the very edge of losing what we value most about this province. Our ancestors would roll over in their graves if they could see what has been happening to this province in the last decade. They understood the importance of being good stewards of the land and water. They respected Mother Nature. Their families lives depended on it. They learned the hard lessons from the Dirty Thirties and the Great Depression and vowed never to take their environment for granted again.

Lest we forget, this can happen again. In fact, it is underway right now, but it is not too late to start turning it around. Do the RIGHT thing, not the politically expedient thing, not due to pressures and threats from a special interest group (namely the factory hog industry).

We ALL lose if the wrong decisions are made after these hearings, even the hog industry. They may make out like bandits for awhile but eventually they too will lose everything.

There are many ambitious and creative people in this province. Give them the tax breaks and incentives and they will create strong, sustainable businesses, for the long term. There is evidence of that happening already, without government help, in some communities already.

Other communities have being torn apart and are feeling that the democratic process has failed them. They have been betrayed. Their taxes are being usurped to support the very industry the majority of residents did not want in their communities.

Empower these people and their communities and they will stay in Manitoba and make it a desirable place to work and raise families. Give the people of Manitoba hope.

I have met many people who have lost hope. They feel powerless against the invasion of the factory hog industry. Do we want the hog industry to own this province? Surely not. It is far too precious and we need to protect it from those who do not understand the consequences of their actions.

Please do underestimate the importance of the issues before you. This is a turning point OR business as usual (with slight modifications for the hog industry). As the saying goes: "Let your conscience be your guide" We cannot turn our heads and ignore what is at stake here. The consequences are too dire. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise Trafford".

Denise Trafford

E-mail: denisetrafford@shaw.ca

PS: I was born and raised in Killarney area. Both my parents were born and still live in there. My grandparents on both sides were pioneers who farmed in Killarney area.



Supporting you in creating a more just, sustainable, and compassionate world

Home

About

Read YES!
Magazine

YES! Articles
by Topic

Get Active

Education
Connection

Speakers
Bureau

YES! Store

Search >>

get YES!

- **FREE Trial Issue**
- **subscribe SPECIAL**
- **donate**
- **gift subscriptions**
- **order back issues**

summer 2000 issue

- **table of contents**
- **Twenty Acres And a Hen**
- **Hog Heaven**
- **Food for Life: The Brink of Opportunity**
- **Wild Rice Moon**
- **Tomato Days**
- **What's So Beautiful About Small**
- **How To Restore the WTO's Momentum**

related links

- **other articles by author**

Join >>

Sign up to our e-newsletter!

Summer 2000 Issue: Food for Life

Hog Heaven

by Brian DeVore

print email bookmark

Dawn is just breaking on a summer morning in northeast Iowa, Chickasaw County, and Tom Frantzen is already hustling. The 47-year-old farmer wants to wrap up hog chores before going to the field to make hay.

But between scooping feed and hauling straw bedding, he takes a moment to point out to a visitor a tangled pile of metal and concrete heaped behind a shed. This is all that's left of a system of **confinement hog production** he and his wife, Irene, **used for 14 years.**

"Those days are gone," says Frantzen without a hint of regret.

Those days consisted of raising hogs in closed buildings with concrete floors. The floors had special slots in them so that urine and feces could drain down into a pit below. All this liquid manure had to be pumped out and disposed of. Such a system was bad for the stressed-out animals (they fought each other and required lots of antibiotics) and the environment (liquid manure often finds its way into waterways), as well as members of the Frantzen family (they had to work in facilities full of dust and toxic gases). In short, says Frantzen, this system treated animals as machines, manure as waste, and farmers as barnyard janitors.

But three years ago the Frantzens junked the trappings of confinement and started raising hogs in **deep-straw bedding in open-ended, Quonset-hut like structures called hoop houses.** The family was already raising hogs on carefully managed pastures in the summer, but producing pork during harsh midwestern winters meant the hogs had to be confined - or so the Frantzens thought until they visited Sweden. There they saw pigs being raised under natural conditions using deep straw bedding.

The family was sold on the system from the start. For one thing, it could be set up for about a **third of the cost of a confinement facility.** In addition, the **pigs were healthier** because they were allowed to follow their natural instincts to socialize and nest. Finally, when the **manure mixed with the straw, it created a composting "pack" that kept the animals warm and served as a valuable fertilizer for crops.**

Still, Tom was apprehensive about making such a significant switch from a system that had the agri-science seal of approval. His concerns were put to rest when he turned those first pigs loose in a just-completed hoop house one day in September 1997.

"They ran around all day long, and they must have run around all night long, too, because when I went out to the building the next morning I will never forget what I found," he recalls. "I peeked into the hoop house to see 180 pigs in one massive straw nest - snoring. I laughed until I cried. Their stress was gone, and so was mine. I know I'll never go back to confinement. Once you cross that road, there is no way you can go back."

Against the grain

To factory farming's boosters, people like Tom Frantzen have done more than cross a road - they've traveled to a galaxy far, far away and landed on Planet Goofball. **The current megatrend in American livestock production is an industrialized system that packs tens of thousands of animals into hard, low-slung buildings run by computers and low-wage employees. This system looks good on paper to Wall Street investors, but on the farm level it's an economic and ecological barnyard bust. Manure spills and shuttered Main Streets are the only bumper crops such facilities are producing these days.**

So many are taking a different route: combining some old-fashioned animal husbandry with new, low-tech facility design and sophisticated ideas about the relationships between livestock and the land.

In dairy, beef, and poultry production, this **new ecologically based farming** has taken the form of management-intensive rotational grazing, a system where animals move frequently through a series of grass-filled paddocks.

But it's the **sustainable trends in hog farming that have caught the most attention recently.** Hundreds of hoop houses have been erected in the Midwest in the past half-dozen years by small farmers like the Frantzens, who market about 1,200 pigs annually.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about sustainable hog production is that it has gained a hoofhold with virtually no support from the land grant university research system, that traditional purveyor of "progressive" farming techniques. Informal farmer-to-farmer information exchanges and research done in Sweden have been the main vectors for this system's spread. And now that a few land grant researchers are finally turning their attention to these methods, they're surprised to find them quite competitive economically, mostly because of low construction and operating expenses. In fact, a hoop structure with deep straw bedding can produce pigs for about \$1.50 per hundred pounds cheaper, according to Iowa State University research and results from Canadian hog trials.

Tight nutrient cycle

But it's the ecological benefits of alternative hog production that are creating the biggest stir. An environmental audit done last year on the Frantzen farm by the University of Northern Iowa found the operation was producing between only 20 and 30 pounds of excess nitrogen per acre annually, a sign that it's extremely efficient at keeping wayward nutrients from becoming environmental pollutants. In comparison, nitrogen loss on factory operations is measured in the hundreds of pounds per acre. Environmental Protection Agency officials have expressed surprise at the lack of odor emanating from hoop houses they've visited in Minnesota, and tests for toxic gases like hydrogen sulfide have shown these facilities to be well within health standards.

Hoop buildings, or any other off-farm products for that matter, aren't environmental silver bullets. Rather, they just happen to lend themselves nicely to a system of farming that considers all of an operation's enterprises and resources as part of a larger whole. The compost produced by the hoop house system is a biologically rich fertilizer, which farmers like the Frantzens use on their crops. Those crops are then fed to the animals and cycled back to the land as manure, helping to produce more feed crops. In addition, the straw itself comes from small grains such as oats, a soil-conserving crop that can naturally break up weed and insect pest cycles. And pasture-farrowing hogs during the summer - along with grazing cattle - helps the Frantzens economically justify having a large portion of their farm in perennial grasses, which add biological diversity to the landscape. Striking such a balance between land, animals, and crops produces a closed nutrient cycle, rather than one that imports a lot of inputs and pumps out even more waste.

Farmers who use diversified, sustainable livestock methods say they help accomplish another important part of their whole farm's overall goal: maintaining a good quality of life.

"It's a fun way to raise pigs, a healthy way to raise pigs and it's profitable," says Preston, Minnesota, farmer Dave Serfling, who, along with his wife, Diane, has participated in studies that show their small, sustainable enterprise is more efficient than much larger operations. "It's a size that I can raise my kids on, keep my bills paid, and have a good life."

All of this is good news to people who are fighting factory operations. Organizers with the recently launched Factory Farm Grassroots Campaign of the Global Resource Action Center for the Environment (GRACE) work with communities threatened by giant livestock operations. Part of their effort involves providing information through visits, as well as the Internet, on how alternative livestock production is more economically and environmentally viable than the factory model. "To just get up and complain about the way hogs are being raised without offering alternatives can't work," says Karen Hudson, an Illinois farmer who works as a grassroots organizer with a GRACE "SWAT" team.

Sustainable shopping

But all the low-cost sustainable livestock production in the world means little if farmers can't get paid a fair price. The good news is that several farmers, including the Frantzens, are now receiving a premium price for antibiotic-free, sustainably produced pork from places like Niman Ranch, a San Francisco-based company. And Organic Valley, a farmer-owned label that requires hogs to be raised in natural conditions, recently made its way into supermarket meat cases. Other farmers are taking their products directly to consumers via farmers' markets and the Internet. These alternatives are in their infancy, and the majority of family farmers are still being denied profits in a market controlled by corporate livestock operations. But Frantzen sees a glimmer of hope every time he delivers more pork to a local natural foods co-op and consumers use their pocketbooks to show him how much they appreciate his efforts to raise hogs sustainably.

"When people make a buying choice they are casting a ballot for the type of food system they want. That sends a tremendously powerful message back to rural America about what sort of farming is valued."

Brian DeVore is editor of the Land Stewardship Letter, a publication of the Minnesota-based Land Stewardship Project. The Project can be reached at <http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/> or 651-653-0618. Contact GRACE at 212-726-9161 or <http://www.gracelinks.org/>.
