

Presentation to the Clean Environment Commission Re Sustainability of the Hog Industry in Manitoba

Introduction

This is not an intellectual treatise. It is an appeal from the heart with the hope that someone will listen to the people of rural Manitoba whose communities cannot sustain a further onslaught of intensive hog operations (ILO). I grew up on a farm in southern Manitoba. I understand the farmer's connection to the land.

In July 1988 a hog sewage lagoon situated on the Whitemouth River broke open during a rainstorm, spewing its contents into the river, and killing all the fish along a 6 mile stretch to the confluence of the Whitemouth and the Winnipeg. Several residents drawing drinking water from the river fell ill. With no objections from either the rural municipality or the Department of the Environment a new and larger lagoon was constructed on the same location. Subsequently the lagoon was emptied by means of a walking gun with sewage sprayed on a small field alongside the river and adjacent to our acreage.

When we formed a citizen's action group, we began receiving calls from desperate people across the province. All were concerned about contamination of ground and surface water by a rapidly expanding hog industry. Most lived near malodorous barns and lagoons, imprisoned in their houses in summer and unable to move because their property was worthless.

That is when I realized that intensive hog operations have nothing to do with farming. The idea of a confined animal operation could never have originated with a farmer. Farmers practise animal husbandry, which is quite a different concept.

The Hog Agenda

At some time in our recent history provincial politicians and bureaucrats became convinced that pork would be the engine to drive the Manitoba economy forward. The Pork Council was established with public funding to accomplish that end. The agriculture, conservation, and municipal affairs departments went into action to implement the agenda.

The first step was to eliminate single desk selling of pigs. All the stops were pulled to locate Maple Leaf Processors in Brandon in spite of grave concerns for the Assiniboine River. Rural Municipalities with no planning bylaws were targeted as locations for barns. Rural councils were wooed with promises of jobs and tax revenue. Soon barns were clustered along Manitoba's rivers and lakes or where aquifers could supply copious quantities of water the slurry system of manure handling required.

The stench from barns and lagoons on hot summer evenings, persistent odour from manure saturated fields thawing in spring, dead pigs floating down the rivers, piles of decomposing mortalities in the fields, spills, leaks, and hordes of flies swiftly convinced rural Manitobans that intensive hog operations were not quite as neighbourly as the guy with a few pigs rooting in the pasture. When they banded together to try and arrest the blight on their landscape, the province counterattacked.

The Farm Practices Protection Act gave agricultural operations virtual immunity from court injunctions and denied neighbours their civil right to sue offensive hog factories for persistent and noxious odour. Technical review committees appointed by the province sat in urban offices writing reports based on information supplied by the proponent. Their reluctance to venture out into the field to determine the lay of the land sometimes left rural folks laughing. In the technical review of a recently approved hog operation in the RM of Lac du Bonnet, sizeable acreage of spread lands was listed as tree covered .

When rural councils began to use municipal planning to control ILO expansion, they were badgered by provincial land use planners to agree to minimal setbacks from the Farm Practices Guidelines. When some councils mentioned ILO bylaws, the government rewrote the Planning Act. This eviscerated the conditional use process and removed all control of manure management from the local government.

The Moratorium

In 2000 I appeared before the Livestock Stewardship Review Panel calling for an immediate ban on liquid manure storage lagoons and a moratorium on ILO expansion. In the interim, the panel reported and with only a few cosmetic changes, the hog industry grew apace, but the ruthless chase for the pork dollar resulted in a fatal mistake.

Olymel and its partners were invited to locate a processing plant in the city of Winnipeg. All hell broke loose. Trucks hauling pigs make noise. Pigs stink. They also scream on their way to slaughter. This would be altogether too unpleasant for delicate city folks. City and province saw votes slipping away daily as the Olywest imbroglio continued. Something had to be done. A moratorium was imposed. (But not before a number of hog barn applications on the books were hastily approved.)

How much further will our government sponsored pork industry go to ensure that expansion proceeds? An article Friday, April 6, 2007 in *The Morden Times* states: On March 5 the commission (CEC) began an eight week series of 17 public hearings scheduled for 14 communities.

Meanwhile, in an effort to get more information out to the general public about the industry, Manitoba Pork Council has launched a multimedia education campaign which will run until May.

The multi pronged approach includes television commercials, radio spots, and inserts into newspapers.

This 4 page piggy spread **Straight Talk on Pork** (*Winnipeg Free Press*, March 4/07) is the coup de grace. Methinks they do protest too much. Since this feature costing approximately \$75,000, was at least partially paid for by my tax dollar, I feel I have the right to offer my perspective on it.
I will comment section by section.

1. **The water we drink**

The liquid manure system used in most ILOs is a colossal waste of water. Staggering amounts of clean water are drawn from ground and surface sources to service this industry. Once the water is run through the hog or used to wash manure from the barn, it is no longer available for human use. Untreated slurry containing pathogens, growth hormones, antibiotics, chemical disinfectants, and excessive amount of nitrogen and phosphorus overspread on inappropriate lands pretty well assures that some of it ends up in our waterways.

The RM of Whitemouth, Seven Sisters Falls, and the RM of Lac du Bonnet are just a few of the rural communities with boil water orders. Lake Winnipeg is dying. We depend on our rivers and wells for drinking water. City residents are guaranteed clean water. To us it seems as though industrial agriculture is guaranteed the right to pollute our water. When the Conservation department endorses open pit hog sewage lagoons, how can we believe the *Water Strategy* is serious?

2. **The air we breathe**

I invite you to spend a summer evening outdoors anywhere within 5 miles of a hog lagoon and you will understand why I am here. Odour is the number one complaint about the hog industry. Emissions from barns and lagoons are a well known health hazard. Citing health concerns, in 2002 the Canadian Medical Association called for a moratorium on factory hog farms. When the nearby hog operation expanded, I voiced my concerns and was intimidated and threatened. Eventually, I was forced to give away my comfortable home and move out of the area.

3. **The economy we create**

4. **The jobs we need**

Is this the type of economy Manitoba needs to become a have province? Would you want your sons and daughters to spend their entire lives working on the killing floor? Or as technicians in a stinking confined animal operation? I think you should find out who takes the wretched jobs in the Brandon plant. I would classify them as exploitation of labour rather than highly desirable jobs. Surely Manitobans are resourceful enough to do better for ourselves.

5. The food we eat

I heard an announcement recently that Walmart plans to go organic . I notice that all the big grocery chains are expanding their organic sections. This tells me that consumers are becoming more discriminating in their food choices. The time is rapidly approaching when they will refuse to eat pork laden with antibiotics and growth hormones and produced in inhumane conditions. Why would a province which purports to value its food industry voluntarily lag behind prevailing consumer opinion?

With rising energy costs and increasing concern for food safety and security, thinking people are turning back to local and smaller food suppliers. Small farmers are coming back into the picture. Laura Rance associate editor of *The Farmers Independent Weekly* in an analysis of the Canadian pork industry concludes Why, when big isn't working, is the only solution to prop the system up so it can keep getting bigger? (*Winnipeg Free Press*, Oct.7/06)

North Carolina Comparison

If an industry really is sustainable, it should not require so many adjustments to make it fit into the landscape. Its footprint on the land should be barely discernable. Unfortunately, Manitoba is not the only place where factory hog farms have left big tracks. Let me refer to North Carolina, because the situations are parallel.

North Carolina is a coastal plain with streams emptying eastward into a large estuary. Manitoba is a floodplain with waterways and wetlands draining into Lakes Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Winnipegosis.

In the last decade swine production soared to over 10 million in North Carolina and over 8 million in Manitoba.

In North Carolina, nutrient overload from the swine industry contaminated ground and surface water causing major eutrophication and species kill in the estuary. We are all here because Lake Winnipeg is covered with algae.

The North Carolina House Committee on Agriculture recently approved a 3 year extension to its 10 year moratorium on new barns and lagoons. Manitoba, too declared a moratorium on expansion. What will happen next?

Conclusion

Will this government go down in history as the one who abandoned Manitoba's waterways and rural communities to the ravages of the corporate hog industry? Or will it learn from the sad experience in other jurisdictions and use this moratorium to begin the long process of restoring agriculture to the sustainable activity it once was?

As an already cynical rural Manitoban, I fear that the moratorium is only a brief interlude while the government concentrates on an election. I suspect that it will be swiftly repealed, Hytek will be refinanced with public money, and the processing plant will be built outside the city of Winnipeg. I will be delighted if you prove me wrong.

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