The restructuring of hog production in North America provides a rare clear view into the mechanisms and effects of corporate globalization. And the community-by-community fight to stop the incursion of corporate mega-barns and retain family farms provides an example of effective and gritty local resistance to the most negative aspects of globalization.

Beyond Factory Farming looks at the changes that have resulted in the hog sector and the effects that these changes have had on our family farms, the food we eat, our conditions of work, our communities, and the relationship of governments to corporations and citizens. Through diverse perspectives, this book highlights, not just the Canadian hog sector, but structural forces at work reshaping communities and economies around the world.

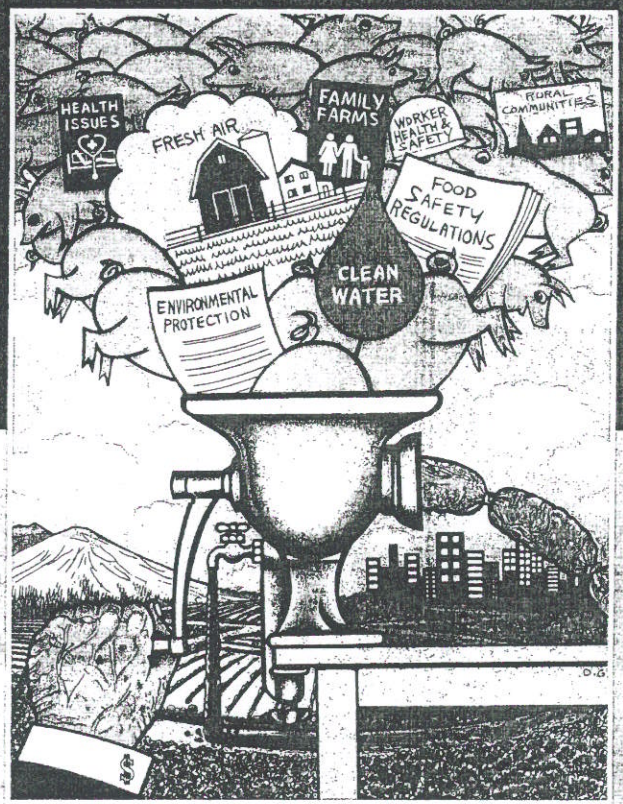
Beyond Factory Farming places the fight to save the family farm and the fight for more sustainable and responsive local economies within the larger context of a global struggle to restore democracy and economic sanity in the face of runaway corporate power. It is a chronicle of what we have lost, a cautionary tale, and a message of hope for the future.

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

ISBN 0-88627-366-8
$19.95.

Cover design by Studio 2
Cover illustration by Dave Geary

Beyond Factory Farming



Corporate Hog Barns and the Threat to Public Health, the Environment, and Rural Communities

EDITED BY
Alexander M. Ervin, Cathy Holtslander, Darrin Qualman, and Rick Sawa

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATI

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National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

National Conference on Intensive Livestock Operations (2nd : 2002 : Saskatoon, Sask.)
Beyond factory farming / edited by Alexander Ervin ... [et al.].

Proceedings of 2nd Annual National Conference on Intensive Livestock Operations held Nov. 9, 2002 in Saskatoon, Sask.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-88627-366-8

. Livestock factories—Congresses. 2. Livestock factories—Canada—Congresses. 3. Canada—Rural conditions—Congresses.
I. Ervin, Alexander M. (Alexander Mackay), 1942- II. Title.

SF391.3.N38 2002 338.1'76'00971 C2003-905031-9

Printed and bound in Canada

Published by

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Saskatchewan
2717 Wentz Ave., Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6
Tel 306-978-5308 Fax 306-922-9162
http://www.policyalternatives.ca
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Acknowledgements

This book has been almost a year in the making. The authors presented their papers at the 2nd Annual National Conference on Intensive Livestock Operations entitled Beyond Factory Farming held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan on November 9, 2002. The editors would like to thank the wide variety of organisations that sponsored and organized the conference and provided seed money for this publication: Global Resource Action Centre for the Environment (GRACE), the Grain Services Union, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, the Saskatchewan Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), National Farmers Union, Saskatchewan Eco Network, Environmental Defence Canada, The Sierra Club of Canada, The Sierra Club of Canada-Saskatoon Parklands Group, The Sierra Club (U.S.), The Council of Canadians, Hog Watch Manitoba, the College of Arts and Sciences—University of Saskatchewan, the Department of Religious Studies and Anthropology—University of Saskatchewan, Oxfam Canada, and the Saskatchewan Environmental Society. The conference organising committee is deserving of recognition: Lisa Bechthold, Sandy Ervin, Loretta Gerlach, Cathy Holtslander, Larry Hubich, Glen Koroluk, Isabel Muzichuk, Simon Neufeld, Darrin Qualman, and Rick Sawa—conference coordinator. The editors are grateful to the National Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives for its assistance with publishing this book.

About CCPA-Sask

The book you hold is the first book-length publication of the Saskatchewan Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA-Sask.). Nationally, the CCPA was launched in 1980 and works to promote research on economic and social issues facing Canada. Through its activities the CCPA wants to demonstrate that there are thoughtful alternatives to the limited perspective of business research institutes and many government agencies. To achieve

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This book is partly based on a conference that CCPA-Sask. helped organize in 2002.

Chapter 3
Pork, Politics, and Power
by Fred Tait

Pork, politics, and power—this mixture of ingredients, when applied in rural communities, can generate a toxic mix that damages the environment, erodes democracy, compromises people's organisations, discredits our civil service, and divides and disrupts communities.

The story of pork, politics, and power is the story of the corporate takeover of Canadian hog production and the effects of unrestrained economic power on governments and communities. The transnational-controlled hog mega-barns of today are just one example of the growing corporate control of agriculture in Canada—where transnational giants are taking control of every aspect of the food system that can be adapted to their model. To understand the situation today, we must first look at the past to understand how much hog production and marketing have been altered.

Single-desk Selling and its Origins

In the 1960s and the 1970s, Manitoba hog farmers were struggling within a market-system that worked against them. Farmers who wanted to sell hogs could not find out the price that packers and other buyers were paying for similar animals (there was no "price transparency"). Individual farmers received different prices for products of equal value. And there were deals made between middlemen and packers. Hog farmers demanded fairer market conditions. As a result, the National Farmers Union (NFU) led the battle to establish a system called "single-desk selling."

Farmers won their battle in 1972 when Manitoba's first NDP government, under Premier Ed Schreyer, created the Manitoba Hog Producers Marketing Board with its single-desk selling powers. To implement single-desk selling, farmers and government worked to-

gether to put in place a producer-controlled marketing structure: any packer who wanted to purchase hogs had to buy from that single-desk seller. Single-desk selling gave farmers total price transparency, equal access to the market, an equal price for products of equal value, and market power when dealing with packers.

During the decades that single-desk selling was in place, and until recently, hog production was well dispersed across the province and production was largely in the hands of small and medium-sized farmers. There was very little conflict between hog farmers and local residents. And hog production followed market signals: when grain prices went up, hog prices went down; farmers adjusted production; and we had—though clearly not perfect—some equilibrium in the production system.

The End of Single-desk Selling

In 1996, Harry Enns—then Manitoba's Minister of Agriculture in the Filmon Conservative Government—arbitrarily ended single-desk selling of hogs with a stroke of a pen. Governments in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Ontario did likewise—unilaterally terminated farmers' single-desk selling agencies. In Manitoba, Enns proceeded against enormous opposition from hog farmers. Farmers loudly voiced their opposition at meetings, and a survey by Manitoba Pork in 1995 indicated that 76% of farmers in Manitoba opposed the end of the single-desk.

Enns justified his move against farmers saying that he wanted to attract a "world-class" hog packing plant to the province, and that he wanted to create competition within the hog industry. "Competition," it turns out, means that farmers must compete with one another to supply lower cost hog "inputs" to packing plants. As Enns wished, Manitoba now has a world-class packing plant, Maple Leaf's. That plant now kills and processes most of the hogs processed in Manitoba. The irony is that Enns' actions transformed Manitoba from having a single-desk *seller* to having virtually a single-desk *buyer*. The results for farmers are predictable: they receive less while producing more, and in many cases they are forced out of production altogether.

Maple Leaf Foods Inc. in Brandon

In February 1998, Maple Leaf Foods Inc. announced that it would build a world-class $112 million hog-packing plant in the city of Brandon. Maple Leaf is owned by one branch of the McCain family. Maple Leaf's 2002 revenues were over $5 billion. It is Canada's largest pork processor. Landmark Feeds, a Maple Leaf subsidiary, is Western Canada's largest animal nutrition company. Maple Leaf's Elite Swine produces over 2.75 million hogs per year.

Maple Leaf's Brandon plant would have a capacity to slaughter 4.5 million hogs annually (operating at maximum capacity). The Conservative government of the day refused to hold the customary Clean Environment Commission hearings despite the scale of the project, despite the attendant need to increase Manitoba hog production by perhaps two million hogs per year (probably raised in mega-barns), despite questions about the discharge of wastewater containing nitrogen and phosphorous from the manure removed from the slaughtered hogs, and despite numerous requests from citizens. Without hearings, the province granted a licence to build the kill and processing plant and also for the wastewater treatment plant that would discharge into the Assiniboine River.

The city of Brandon, a major player in this whole enterprise, signed an agreement with Maple Leaf that the city would build the wastewater treatment plant at taxpayers' expense: an estimated $6-to-$7 million. The city also agreed to pay Maple Leaf for any losses that resulted from packing plant shutdowns caused by any failure of the wastewater treatment system—a costly risk for the city.

Luckily, provincial officials effectively ensured that the city of Brandon would never be put in the expensive situation of having to compensate Maple Leaf for shutdown costs. Provincial officials did so by assigning to the city the responsibility for monitoring the quality of water in the Assiniboine River downstream from the Maple

Leaf plant. Cearly, the city of Brandon cannot afford to find problems with the water quality in the Assiniboine River.

There were other pitfalls. In its wisdom, the province decided that it was not necessary to construct a treatment plant that could remove phosphorous from the slaughter-plant wastewater. Today, tests of the effluent from the Maple Leaf plant show phosphorus content up to seven times the predicted levels, and tests indicate highly elevated phosphorous levels in the Assiniboine River downstream of the Maple Leaf plant (Patton, n.d.).

When Brandon finished building a wastewater treatment plant for Maple Leaf, the city faced a significant cost over-run. The final cost almost doubled the initial estimate of $6-to-$7 million. Far worse, however, Maple Leaf looked at the finished product and, in effect, said: "Well that's very nice, but there's a problem, you must have misunderstood: You've build a wastewater treatment plant to serve one shift and we intend to go to two." Thus, Brandon's final cost over-run (Maple Leaf has announced that it will add a second shift in 2004) may be in excess of $20 million. This will be a heavy burden for a city of 30,000 people.

The subsidies to the Maple Leaf's Brandon plant continue to mount but so far include:

- Hog farmers are subsidizing the plant through lower hog prices resulting from the termination of single-desk selling.
- The environment is subsidizing the plant as rivers and lakes struggle to absorb the phosphorous from the plant and the phosphorous and nitrogen from the hog mega-barns that supply the plant.
- The people of Brandon are subsidizing Maple Leaf by paying for the waste-water treatment plant and, soon, its expansion, as well as through business tax breaks and by providing the land for the plant for $1 (Chambers, n.d.).
- The province of Manitoba is subsidizing the plant by contributing about $11 million for sewers, roads, and a worker training plan.
- The federal government contributed $3 million in subsidies.
- Workers across Canada are subsidizing the plant through lower wages—brought down by a joint program of Maple Leaf and the province of Manitoba to bring in migrant Mexican workers. This is necessary because insufficient numbers of Canadians would work in the plant due to low wages and poor working conditions. In addition, beginning in 1995, Maple Leaf and other corporate packers began a string of lock-outs and labour disputes and forced their workers to take wage rollbacks of up to 40%. These rollbacks will reduce Maple Leaf's labour costs at its Brandon plant enough to pay for the $112 million cost of that plant every six years.

In addition, there are the costs, borne by taxpayers, of dealing with a poorly-paid, transient workforce—policing, social services, addictions counselling, health care, workers' compensation, and family abuse.

The Struggle to Re-establish Single-desk Selling

So Brandon got its hog plant and farmers lost single-desk selling. But farmers' struggle to restore their single-desk went on.

The Conservative government that had removed single-desk selling for hogs was defeated in the general election of September 1999 and replaced with the present New Democratic Party (NDP) government of Premier Gary Doer. Because the NDP, when in opposition, had opposed the end of single-desk selling and promised to reinstate it if New Democrats got elected (Bell, 2000), farmers were optimistic that an injustice would soon be reversed.

Soon after the NDP's 1999 election win, NFU member Ken Sigurdson and I drove to Winnipeg to meet with Rob Hilliard, the President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour. We told Mr. Hilliard that a great injustice had been done to farmers. Farmers' collective marketing power was arbitrarily taken away from them. We said to him,

> This injustice must be repaired, because single-desk selling for farmers is equivalent to collective-bargaining rights for labour. We want organized labour's support to restore sin-

gle-desk selling in this province. Now that we have a government back in power that will be supportive of the principle of farmers and workers having collective bargaining power, we need to push this issue, and the best place to push it is at the upcoming NDP Convention.

We got a very good hearing from Rob Hilliard.

In February of 2000, in Brandon, the Manitoba NDP held its first Convention after forming government. As luck would have it, the NDP invited me to speak on an agricultural panel at their convention. I was there as a guest. On the first evening, Ken Sigurdson moved an emergency resolution to support the restoration of single-desk selling for hogs. The Convention chair declared that the resolution carried by the required two-thirds majority and right away there was a challenge to the chair. A standing vote was called.

I was sitting at a table—in the right place, it turned out—and just by accident, I overheard a convention delegate urging his people: "Make sure everybody is in this room. We have to defeat this resolution." At the time, I did not know the gentleman who was giving those instructions. The standing vote was called, and the motion to allow the emergency resolution was defeated. The person I had heard giving instructions to his delegates to defeat the motion turned out to be none other than Bernie Christophe, then President of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Union in Manitoba. The UFCW is the union that represents almost all of Manitoba's packing plant workers. Christophe spoke against the resolution. To add insult to injury, Rob Hilliard failed to have the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) delegates vote in favour of the resolution. Most voted against it. And so, in that vote, an alliance in this country that had lasted for perhaps 60 years—that had lasted from at least the beginning of the CCF, and probably from before that; an alliance of workers and farmers struggling together in a common front to create a better society—suddenly was divided. That alliance of farmers and labour was betrayed.

We did not give up after the defeat of our resolution at the 2000 NDP convention. The next year, we took another run at it; because

we were determined that justice for farmers should prevail. In preparation for the 2001 convention, Ken, myself, and other NFU members again worked very diligently, doing a lot of background work—meeting and lobbying. And we went to that second convention, this time in Winnipeg, and moved another emergency resolution.

Just prior to that convention, Manitoba Minister of Agriculture Rosann Wowchuk called a meeting of selected farm leaders, in Portage La Prairie. And there she said: "The Premier is starting to change his position. He's at a point where I think he will probably accept single-desk selling as long as we don't push him too hard on the issue."

Seeing that the minister was doing her best to restore single-desk selling, I thought she could use all the support she could get. So Ken Sigurdson and I moved our second emergency resolution and got strong support. Again, we needed a two-thirds majority to get the resolution accepted and to refer it to a vote. This time, we got almost unanimous support: the party structure had been caught off guard by the mistaken belief that we had been placated by Minister Wowchuk's assurances that the premier was starting to change his position on single-desk selling. Our resolution would go to the convention floor.

When the resolution was debated the following day, the Minister of Agriculture spoke against it and moved an amendment that would require the province's hog producers to call for a vote to restore single-desk selling. The amended resolution passed, with the government and others knowing well that a hog farmer could not publicly involve him- or herself in any campaign to restore single-desk selling without putting at risk his or her hog production contract with Maple Leaf as well as access to the market.

After the debate on the resolution was over, a *Winnipeg Free Press* reporter named Helen Fallding asked Manitoba Premier Gary Doer about his reaction to the vote and the divisive issue. Premier Doer responded by saying that he had promised Maple Leaf Foods President Michael McCain that there would be no return to single-desk marketing in Manitoba (Fallding, 2001).

When we think about that promise to Michael McCain, we have to consider that Michael McCain is not a resident of Manitoba. He's neither a member of, nor a major contributor to, the New Democratic Party: in fact, he represents everything that the founders of the movement would have opposed. Yet a promise was made to Michael McCain that overwhelms all of the province's history and the dedication of the people who fought for progressive policies in this province. While meeting with Premier Doer behind closed doors, McCain was able to compromise a legacy reaching as far back as the general strike of 1919. That legacy includes the heritage of J. S. Woodsworth, Stanley Knowles, and M. J. Coldwell; the creation of the CCF; the proud legacy of Manitoba farm leaders Jake Shultz and Max Hoffer; and former Premiers Ed Schreyer and Howard Pawley. In this one meeting, the long struggle of farmers to gain market power and single-desk selling was reversed. This historic transfer of power had taken place without prior public debate or a mandate from the electorate. We must now realistically consider the possibility that this new alliance of government, business, and labour will at some time in the future be tempted to silently agree to the termination of farmers' supply management agencies or the Canadian Wheat Board.

Michael McCain was able to compromise all that history, all those community meetings in the 1960s and 70s, all that effort to bring about single-desk selling and to gain marketing power for farmers. The man whose company stood to make millions in profits from lower hog prices ultimately decided whether farmers would enjoy the market power of single-desk selling.

Key Union Leaders Oppose Single-desk Selling

It is clear why Michael McCain might work against farmers, why he might oppose farmers' right to bargain collectively. It is less clear, however, why some labour unions would do so (some unions, such as the Grain Services Union, have stood in solidarity with farmers). One has to wonder then, what has happened here? Why would representatives of organized labour break their long-standing alliance with farmers? Part of the answer may be the Crocus Investment Fund: a labour-sponsored investment capital fund in Manitoba. Rob Hilliard, president of the Manitoba Federation of Labour, is also the chair of the board of directors of the Crocus Fund. And the Crocus Fund is a major investor ($1.8 million) in a company called Enterprise Swine Ltd. and a major investor ($900,000) in Turtle Mountain Pork. (Both the Enterprise and Turtle Mountain operations are operated by Dynamic Pork, a joint venture of N. M. Patterson & Sons and Manitoba Pork.)

Mega-barn investments by a labour-sponsored investment fund chaired by the President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour raises a number of questions. Currently, workers in hog mega-barns are exempted from Manitoba's *Employment Standards Act*. Have the Crocus Fund and the Manitoba Federation of Labour used their investment to raise working standards for its hog barn workers? Did the Crocus Fund directors use their investment to change the industry-standard practice of applying manure based on a crop's nitrogen needs (and, in so doing, over-applying phosphorus)? Did the Crocus Fund directors make their investment so that they could demonstrate a superior model of manure storage: an alternative to digging a hole in the dirt, filling it full of hog manure, and calling it leading-edge technology and best-of-industry practice? These are rather embarrassing questions, I suspect. In correspondence, the Crocus Fund finally replied that, in its investments, it adopted leading-edge technology. But what is leading-edge technology in the mega-barn sector? It is that you underpay your labour, and employ them under the farm labour code. You put your manure in a hole in the ground because that is the cheapest system. There is virtually no difference between the way that Crocus-funded barns are raising hogs and the way that other corporate mega-barns are raising hogs.

The labour movement put itself in a terrible conflict of interest by investing in corporate hog production. The Crocus Fund's return on that investment would be affected by the costs of running its operations. So, with its investments, Crocus acquired an interest in seeing that the costs of running its barns were not increased as a result of stringent environmental regulations or proper labour codes.

The other factor that may have undermined the judgment of many in the labour movement and caused them to work against farmers' interests was the prospect of Maple Leaf's Brandon plant employing 1,100 people on a single shift. These workers would be union members. Better yet, these workers would be largely a transient labour force that would move through the system (the worker turnover rate at the Brandon plant in the first year was well in excess of 100% and it has continued to escalate). And for some union leaders, that is a desirable situation: If you have got a stable, long-term labour force, they become unruly and start talking about changes to contracts and to union leadership. With the Brandon plant, the union in charge, the UFCW, would get the dues from 1,100 workers continually changing through the plant, and from an additional 900 workers when a second shift is added. Almost the entire labour movement in Manitoba has been silent on this issue and seems willing to accept indentured labour.

Mega-barns and Standards in Manitoba

Clearly, Michael McCain, the Manitoba government, and many in the Manitoba labour movement wanted the Brandon packing plant and its 1,100 to 2,000 jobs. But what about the barns needed to supply that plant? What will be the impact of the millions of pigs and the hundreds of corporate mega-barns on rural Manitoba and on the Manitoba environment?

The Crocus Fund and the Manitoba Federation of Labour tried to justify their investments by talking about "leading-edge" technology and better standards, when all along they were just following the mega-barn model that has proved so damaging in the U.S. and elsewhere. The Manitoba government similarly tries to pretend that standards in Manitoba are significantly higher than standards in North Carolina and other jurisdictions where the proliferation of hog mega-barns has meant fouled rivers, contaminated wells, the expulsion of family farmers, and divided rural communities.

Staff in Manitoba's Departments of Intergovernmental Affairs, Agriculture, and Conservation have repeatedly assured me that, "We're not going to make the same mistakes here in Manitoba that were made in North Carolina." The Minister of Agriculture told me, "We're going to do things different here in Manitoba."

The refrain from every department and level of government is that Manitoba has the "the best regulations in Canada." Often, carried away by enthusiasm, they declare: "We've got the best regulations in North America."

And how does this "best-regulations-in-North-America" system work? A proponent designs a project, picks a location, draws up the diagrams of the earthen storage and of the actual barn construction, and so on. The proponent puts all this information into a proposal with all the engineering data and presents it to a local municipal council. Provincial officials assume that local municipal councillors do not have the expertise to assess such complex proposals, and so the municipalities are urged to pass the proposal to one of the province's Technical Review Teams. The Technical Review Teams are made up of civil servants from Agriculture, Intergovernmental Affairs, and Conservation. Team members look at the technical and design aspects of the proposed barns and then send the proposal back to the local council with a recommendation. There has never been a case, to my knowledge, where a Technical Review Team has rejected a proposal. The Teams always say that the proposal "meets or exceeds" guidelines. The Technical Review Team may say that it has "concerns" with one aspect or another, but it never rejects a proposal. Often, after these proposals come back from the Technical Review Team, dedicated individuals working with HogWatch Manitoba take these proposals apart, word by word. I will give you some examples of the errors that we find.

I was involved with groups opposing a proposal to build a barn north of Portage La Prairie. The Technical Review Team approved the project. Two of the civil servants on the Technical Review Team were sitting in the cafeteria in the provincial building in Portage La Prairie and were overheard saying: "I don't know why those people are opposing that project. We reviewed that proposal and it meets

and exceeds every requirement that the province has. They're wasting their time. They haven't a hope of defeating this proposal."

Despite the endorsement of the project and its details by that Review Team, at the next stage—the conditional use hearing that the municipality must hold—we pointed out to the municipal council that the drawings of the earthen storage lagoon were technically wrong. We pointed out to the council that the capacity of the manure lagoon, listed in the report as large enough to hold 400 days of manure, was wrong: it could not hold 400 days' worth of manure. We showed the council that the soil permeability tests—a key determining factor in whether a lagoon will leak—were not calculated correctly. Some of us joked that this was probably why the lagoon was built undersized—because they knew it was going to leak! And we pointed out to the council that the text said that there would be a cold storage area in the barn to store mortalities: but the blueprints showed no such facility in the barn. And the Technical Review Team had missed it all. The system had failed. The council wrote a scathing report critical of the Technical Review Team work, and further recognized the work of citizen groups that had identified the flaws in the proponent's material that had helped the council come to the unanimous decision to reject the proposal.

And the Portage barn is not an isolated incident. There have been other instances where people, lay people, have taken apart these proposals for barns and found numerous flaws that were missed by the Technical Review Teams. So we asked the Technical Review people: "What's going on? How come you missed these errors?" We got a letter saying that Technical Review Team members "are not required to check the proponent's material for accuracy." Well, if the Technical Review Team does not check for accuracy, who does? It should not be up to a bunch of ordinary citizens, scattered around rural communities, to analyze and check all this technical data in order to protect the public good and the environment. It seems to me, as taxpayers, in a democracy, that we should employ independent public servants to do that work.

Increasingly, however, we do not employ independent public servants to do research, to test for safety, or to assess the accuracy of data

submitted by corporations. When we look at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the procedures they use to license veterinary drugs, we see that we have reduced funding and staffing at our independent public labs, and that the remaining scientists are reduced to reviewing data submitted by the proponent corporations. Increasingly, in all parts of our food safety and environmental protection system, the developer's or the proponent's material is given to people in the various branches of the public service to accept and these public servants are denied an opportunity to do their own research or tests to verify that data. Our public servants cannot protect the public interest. The government has reduced these public servants to legitimizing something that does not have legitimacy. This has put incredible pressure on these public servants. We have people out on stress leave and others threatening to resign. This mixture of pork, politics, and power is destroying these people's credibility in their community and putting this stress upon them. And it is destroying the safety and regulatory systems that we rely on as citizens, as well as helping to destroy the public's trust in government.

A barn built near Souris provides another example of how Manitoba's approval system breaks down. Because the soil where the barn was to be built was very porous, the engineer stated that the manure storage pit would need a clay liner. After construction, the engineer issued an engineering certificate that this earthen manure storage pit was built to the proper standard, that there was a clay liner put into the pit, and that it met all the provincial guidelines. And so the province then issued a license to operate the mega-barn and the manure storage pit. Local residents said, "That's darn strange. How could they put a clay liner in that pit without any trucks hauling clay in there?" Nobody from the civil service went and looked at the site or the pit; they just accepted the data from the proponent and the engineer. The barn had gone into operation in November and by April there was no liquid in the lagoon—it had all gone into the aquifer.

As a third example, we had a proposal in 2001 near Dauphin called CanMark Family Farms (the "Can" and the "Mark" in the name refer to Canada and the barn's investors from Denmark). Provincial regulations say that when you will build your manure storage

pit that you must strip off all the top soil, you must put your earth liner into the pit in six inch layers, you must pack it to certain densities, and you must have no rocks over six inches in diameter. A local farmer, Charles Beer, was out at the construction site every day. It was just after harvest when the contractor started building the manure storage pit. The contractor did not even bother burning the swath and the stubble off. They never stripped the topsoil. And they buried rocks up to 30 inches in diameter. The local farmer filmed the lagoon construction every day, and he complained to the Department of Conservation. Department officials came out and said that the contractor would have to tear the lagoon up and rebuild it. The Conservation official went back to Brandon and the contractor put the lagoon back together exactly the same as it was the first time. Today, that lagoon is licensed and operating.

As a final example, on July 21, 2002 at 9:15 p.m., near the community of McGregor, Manitoba, not far from where I live, an aboveground, steel manure storage tank burst. A million gallons of hog slurry dropped out onto sandy soil. Soon, all that was left on the surface was the solids: the rest entered the aquifer. Two wells in the immediate area were contaminated.

We did not know any of this right away; Manitoba's Department of Conservation is not required to report manure spills to the public. About 10 days after the accident, a reporter told me that he had received an anonymous call that something went wrong at McGregor. He gave me a land location and I drove over. You could see what had happened. The media jumped all over the issue and the government and the industry attempted damage control. They said, "Yes, there was a spill, but the system worked, because the spill was reported within an hour and fifteen minutes." What they did not tell the public, however, was that prior to the spill they had not known that the barn or storage tank was there. The government in Manitoba claims that it has the best regulations in North America, but it doesn't even know where most of the barns are, because any barn built before 1998 in Manitoba was not licensed, and thus not recorded.

That manure storage in McGregor was a salvaged tank from some other operation in the U.S. It was brought into Manitoba and reassembled. Robert Kozuch, president of Engineered Storage Products, the firm that originally manufactured the tank, issued a news release on August 23, 2002 that said: "The failure of this structure is an unfortunate incident and it should not have occurred...We believe that the failure of this tank was due to gross negligence on the part of the contractor that assembled the tank." I would contend that the incident also exposes gross negligence on the part of the government that should have regulated the building of that tank and should have known where it was.

Mega-barns and the Family Farm

Hog mega-barns damage the environment, and they are equally damaging to family farms. In 1991, there were 2,969 hog producers in Manitoba. In 2001, just 1,379 remained: a loss of 54% in 10 years.

The 1,379 hog producers that remain produced, in 2001, 6,350,000 hogs. These hogs had a total market value of $860 million. Agriculture Ministers just love to get up and rattle off these kinds of statistics. But Ministers and other mega-barn promoters leave out some important information. Manitoba's *Farmers' Independent Weekly* reported that 11% of those producers, just 152 in total, produced 82% of all those hogs. Those 152 operations, that 11% of hog producers, produced 5,270,000 of those hogs. Those 152 operations earned $705 million, for an average earning per operation of $4.6 million. Now there is a family farm!

For the other 1,227 producers, their gross earnings from hog production averaged $126,000 each. It would require very few additional operations the size of the big 152 to occupy all the space in the market that those other 1,227 small producers currently supply.

The makeup of the hog production sector directly affects the makeup of the Manitoba Pork Council, the organization that, in theory, works on behalf of those 1,227 smaller hog producers. The Manitoba Pork Council collects an 85¢ per-head check-off on mar-

ket hogs and a 20¢ per head check-off on export weanlings. This gives the Council a total budget of over $3 million per year. And just as those 152 large operations produce 82% of the hogs in Manitoba, these 152 large operations contribute 82% of the Manitoba Pork Council's budget. Those 152 producers, because of their contribution to the organization, have significant influence on the policy statements and the political work of the Council.

One of the things that the Manitoba Pork Council—and the marketing arm, the Manitoba Pork Marketing Co-op Inc.—does with that $3 million per year is to run a public relations campaign on behalf of its large producers. This campaign includes clever television ads. One ad shows a farm family out playing in its yard, kicking a soccer ball. The husband walks over to an open-air, hoop-style hog shelter. His hogs are happy, playing on straw bedding, and he wanders around among them and talks about what a great thing the hog industry is. What a beautiful picture: not a mega-barn or a manure lagoon in sight. What a deceptive picture: the 82% of Manitoba's hogs that come from those 152 large operations never come near an open-air barn or near straw bedding. And the big packers are going out of their way to ensure that hogs in the future will *never* come near to the open air or to straw: Maple Leaf Foods has indicated that in the near future, it will not purchase hogs from any open-air system because, it claims, of the fear that birds could introduce salmonella and stray cats could introduce toxoplasmosis into the hog herd. Thus, not only is the pork industry's television ad—open-air barns and happy hogs—not representative of most of Manitoba's hog production, but these "producer groups" are working with packers to ensure that the scene depicted in their ads will disappear completely from the Manitoba countryside. It is easy to predict the negative effects on smaller, family farm hog producers when Maple Leaf stops buying hogs from anyone with an open-air barn.

So the big packers and the big barns do not seem very beneficial to the farm families that produce, or formerly produced, hogs. The other argument that we hear, however, in rural Manitoba and rural Saskatchewan and rural Alberta, is that these mega-barns will create a new market for feed grain and thus increase the price for grain

farmers. This argument is false because it ignores the economic fact that grain prices in rural Manitoba, rural Saskatchewan, and rural everyplace, will be world price backed off for freight. To understand this, ask: How will mega-barn owners determine what to pay for feed grain? Answer: they will match, perhaps with a small or no premium, what the farmer would get from the alternative market. The alternative market is the export market, the world market. But to access that world market, a farmer in Manitoba would have to pay the rail freight bill to Vancouver or Thunder Bay. In the alternative market, the world market, the farmer would get world price less freight costs. The mega-barns match this price. Thus, with or without hog mega-barns, the price of feed grain in Manitoba will be world price less freight.

Conclusions

So what do we have in Manitoba, this province with the "highest hog production standards in North America," perhaps in the world? We have a packing plant in Brandon that the government decided could release its wastewater into the river without removing the phosphorous. We have water quality in the river monitored by a financially-strapped city that is required to pay Maple Leaf if water quality problems force the packing plant to suspend operations. We have substandard hog lagoons and manure tanks that leak and spill manure slurry which then gets into the groundwater and surface water.

We have civil servants on stress leave because they are not allowed to properly examine data submitted by proponent corporations. We have regulators that do not even know the locations of the barns that they are supposed to monitor.

We have a government that refuses to reinstate farmers' single-desk selling advantage because of a promise made to the owner of the biggest packing plant. And we have open season on family farm hog producers.

We have labour leaders turned against farmers, breaking a generations-old alliance with farmers and actually investing in the mega-

barns that are wiping out family farms, all in order to gain higher returns on investments.

And we have parasitic corporate industrial operations extracting the wealth from rural areas and, most importantly, dividing communities. The mixture of pork, politics, and power really does damage the environment, erode democracy, compromise peoples' organisations, discredit parts of our civil service, and divide and disrupt rural communities.

But citizens are fighting back and taking control again. In Manitoba, as in other places across this country and in the United States, we are winning this political battle at a local level. In the municipal elections in Manitoba in October of 2002, at least 30 people were elected who have been active in questioning and opposing mega-barns. We know of at least two municipal councils where mega-barn opponents have majority control.

The industry, suspecting that they were not going to do well politically, ran off to the province, and asked the government to take control of the situation. We want some "predictability" and "consistency," said the pork industry. Now, "predictability" and "consistency" are code words designed to obscure moves to take democratic control away from the people. The Province of Manitoba has announced that it intends, sometime in 2004, to take the democratic control away from local citizens by forcing the municipalities to adopt livestock bylaws that conform to provincial standards. Once this is done, a proponent will be able to locate a barn as close as 656 feet from any single residence and locate a lagoon as close as one mile from a community.

But the province and the industry will not succeed in suppressing the people. I've been chair of HogWatch Manitoba for three years. I've travelled around the whole province, and I've met people down in Piney, up the western side of the province in Angusville and Russell, and all over the province. And I am convinced of the strength of those people and those communities.

I was at a town hall meeting in March 2002 in Swan Lake. And there was a young farm woman there who had never been involved in issues before. Her name was Colleen Theissen. A barn was to be

built near to her home and she said, "I'm downwind, I'm downhill, I'm downstream, and I'm damned mad!" She had organized the meeting and she was going to be on the panel and she was very nervous. And yet when it came time for her to make her presentation, I have never heard anybody speak so eloquently.

She talked about the struggle of agriculture, and about the constant struggle for people to survive in an economy that is so heavily weighted against them, and about the environmental factors that can also make it difficult for us. And she talked about three families. She traced the history of the first family back for 100 years, and she gave a brief description of the land they had occupied and what they had done. And she said their descendants were at that meeting that night. And she asked them to stand up. And they stood up and were recognized. She did the same for the two other families and they stood up. Then she concluded her remarks and asked, "Is it not time for the rest of you to stand up?" And they did. For me, that is what this struggle is about: It's about us standing up. This is our place. We are so old-fashioned in our thinking, we believe that we should have a say, as citizens, in constructing an economy that serves the needs of our community. We have no responsibility here to serve the needs of corporate investors who want to build hog barns. That is not our mandate.

We have to stand up to a destructive ideology that is destroying rural communities. The very ideology that destroyed the Crow Rate and took that economic benefit away from farmers, the very ideology that tore up the branch lines, the ideology that demolished the rural elevators, the ideology that stripped every bit of wealth from the prairies and left so much despair and waste: that ideology and its advocates now claim that they will save us by giving us hog mega-barns. No thanks. They've done enough for us already. From this point on, we stand up. We take control. May the struggle continue.

This text is based on two speeches by Fred Tait: one at the Second Annual National Conference on Intensive Livestock Operations: Beyond Factory Farms (November 9, 2002); and the Second at the 33rd Annual

National Convention of the National Farmers Union (November 23, 2002); both in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

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