

## NO MORE to CAFOs

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*Presented at the annual meeting of Jefferson County Farmers and Neighbors Association in Fairfield, IA on October 16, 2013 – following a video presentation honoring Lynn Henning, winner of the 2010 Goldman Environmental Prize for North America.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvfNEeQq6oo> .

Lynn Henning is an outstanding example of the rural people who have had enough and are saying “NO MORE” to CAFOs. She is a farmer and a long-time resident of a rural community, she was not an activist and probably didn't give CAFOs or factory farms a second thought until they began to move in around her farm. She was not an environmentalist or an activist, but she became both when it became necessary to protect the physical health and quality of life of her family. There was a point in time when Lynn felt compelled to say, “NO MORE” to CAFOs.

She talked with the CAFO operators and regulators but to no avail. The operators were obstinate and the regulators seemed powerless. She decided she was going to have to do something herself. She began to sample the water round her farm to prove she was not an emotional and irrational farm wife. CAFOs routinely foul the air and water of their neighbors with odors and animal excrement and Lynn Henning set out to prove it. She may not have been able to stop them, at least not yet, but they were violating federal laws, and Lynn was going to hold them accountable.

She may be more committed and more effective than most, but is no different in other respects from many people I have met in the 16 states, 4 Canadian provinces, and Wales in the United Kingdom where I have worked with opponents of CAFOs. Like Lynn, most of these concerned and committed people are “real farmers” who are concerned about the future of agriculture and rural communities.

A new, corporately-funded public relations campaign is designed to discredit people like Lynn Henning and others who oppose CAFOs. They label opponents as uninformed, emotional, irrational, activists who want to destroy animal agriculture. This simply not true. Admittedly, some CAFO opponents get emotional. At a recent conference in York, PA I met a man in a wheelchair who has been physically disabled by a neurological disorder that his doctor attributes to living too close to a CAFO. He has been advised to either abandon his home or prepare to die. I also met a mother whose daughter is suffering from a respiratory illness that has made her unable to function in school, and her son had a nasal infection that eventually led to bleeding from his ears. The problems began after the hog farm next door expanded into a CAFO. These

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people were emotional in their opposition to CAFOs; righteously emotional. “Emotion in defense of fairness is no vice, indifference to injustice is no virtue.”

The people who oppose CAFOs may get emotional, but they are not irrational environmental activists or animal rightist, as suggested by CAFO defenders. Most are intelligent, informed, thoughtful, compassionate, and caring rural people who understand the difference between agriculture and industry, between real farms and factory farms. It's CAFOs that are foreign to rural America; people like Lynn are trying to protect the future of animal agriculture and rural communities. These thoughtful, caring people feel an ethical and moral responsibility to stand up and say “NO MORE” to CAFOs.

The corporately-funded PR campaign uses young farmers as the “front men” to give CAFOs an “illusion” of authenticity and integrity. Many of these young farmers have been brainwashed by the agriculture establishment to believe CAFOs are their only means of getting into agriculture on their own, that CAFOs are the future of farming. This is simply not true. First CAFOs are not farms, they are factories. CAFOs smell and pollute industrial operations, like factories, but they are virtually unregulated, as existing regulations are woefully inadequate and generally unenforced. Second, the comprehensive corporate contracts under which CAFOs operate will leave these young farmers as something less than “corporate serfs” on their own farms. When they no longer serve the corporations' economic interest, they will be cast aside with little concern for their future or the future of agriculture. It's time to say “NO MORE” to this kind of future for agriculture.

The multi-million-dollar PR campaign is designed specifically to defend “industrial agriculture” against growing concern about food safety, environmental impacts, animal welfare, and economic necessity. CAFO supporters have shifted from calling for “good science” to public relations to support their propaganda because “real science” provides strong evidence for indicting industrial agriculture on each of these counts. CAFOs are the epitome of industrial agriculture.

The corporate propaganda campaign claims meat, milk, and eggs produced in CAFOs are safe and wholesome. The scientific facts and government statistics tell a very different story. Recalls of food products contaminated with infections bacteria originating in CAFOs have become almost routine. For example, an outbreak Salmonella in the past few days has sickened hundreds of people across the country. In this case, as in many others, several strains of infections bacteria were resistant to multiple antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance is increasingly linked to CAFOs, as they are ideal breeding grounds for antibiotic resistance. The deadly antibiotic resistant streptococcus bacteria called MRSA now kills more Americans than AIDS.

The PR campaign claims that CAFO operators are responsible stewards of the environment. Reams of environmental data, much of it compiled by the EPA, tell a different story. For example, the EPA recently reported that 35,000 miles of streams in 19 states had been polluted by CAFOs. The number of pollution “impaired waterways” in Iowa have increased three-fold since hog production has moved off smaller family farms into large CAFOs.

The PR campaign claims CAFOs operators are committed to the humane treatment of animals. The fact that CAFO supporters all across the country are trying to make it illegal to take pictures of animals in CAFOs tell a different story. CAFOs are virtual “animal concentration camps” where too many animals are confined in spaces too small to allow any respect for animals as sentient beings or to afford even an opportunity for humane treatment.

The PR campaign claims that CAFOs are an economic necessity to meet the food needs of America and a hungry world. Decades of USDA data completely contradict this fallacy. Farmers are not producing any more meat, milk, or eggs with CAFOs than they were producing in the past or could produce in the future; they are just producing more animals with far fewer farmers. Retail prices of meat, milk, and eggs have continued to rise as the numbers of CAFOs rise. Any economic benefits from CAFOs have gone to investors in CAFO corporations, not to consumers, not to farmers, and certainly not to rural communities.

CAFO proponents are right in one respect, resistance to CAFOs is growing among rural and urban people alike and more people are finding the courage to stand up and say: “NO MORE.” We are building up to what will perhaps be the greatest and most decisive battle of the great CAFO war – a war we must continue to fight on all fronts. We must fight for enforcement of existing regulations. We must fight for stronger regulations. We must take legal actions against government agencies that fail to regulate, and file nuisance law suits against those who finance and operate CAFOs when they fail to respect the rights of their neighbors. We must continue to the battle on all fronts if we are to win.

We must reclaim of basic human right of self-determination and self-defense. The 5,000 hog CAFO recently built between Batavia and Eldon will produce as much toxic biological wastes as a town of 15,000 people; 50% more than the population of Fairfield. The CAFO will be spreading this this sewage in the “backyards” of their neighbors. The people of those communities don't need a panel of public health experts to tell them this is a threat to their health and overall well-being. They have a basic human right to self-determination and self-defense. They have every right to say “NO MORE” to CAFOs.

I personally, not speaking for JFAN or SRAP, would like to see a national boycott of CAFO products. I would like to see pickets all across the country in front of supermarkets and fast food restaurants holding signs that say: “NO MORE” to CAFOS. “NO MORE” to food contamination by CAFOs, “NO MORE” to air and water polluted by CAFOs, “NO MORE” to animals mistreated by CAFOs, “NO MORE” to lies about the economic necessity of CAFOs, “NO MORE to CAFOs.”

Many will say our individual efforts are hopeless, that the supporters are too economically and politically powerful. However, we can't know the outcome of our efforts because the future is yet to be determined, and it will depend on others as well as ourselves. I believe we each have a purpose in life, a path that we were meant to walk, and that no path is more important than any other in fulfilling our collective purpose for being. The greatest contribution any of us can make in life is to simply do our part and trust that others will do theirs, and together, we can create a better world – including a world without CAFOs.

We have an ethical or moral compass to guide us along our path of purpose. We simply need to find the courage to do what we know in our hearts we should do. In the words of Wendell Berry: “We don't have a right to ask that question (whether we will succeed). We have to ask what's the right thing to do and go ahead and do it and take no thought for the morrow.” Or in the words of an old Indian chief preparing warrior for battle, “We will not be judged the battles we win or lose but by the battles we chose to fight.” Regardless of the outcome, we must do what we know in our hearts is the right thing to do. For many of us, that means standing up, saying: “NO MORE” to CAFOs.