

Former hog proponent soured on experience

Editor's note: The writer of this letter lives in Neilburg, Sask. which is located 40 km east of the Alberta border and southeast of Lloydminster. He admits the hog operation built by Heartland Livestock was one of the first in the province, and things may have changed at other locations. He does, however, provide a first hand account of his experience in dealing with a hog operation.

Dear Editor:

At the time the idea of the 2500 sow Heartland Barn surfaced in 1996 we had owned and operated a 100 sow farrow-to-finish operation for the past 18 years. I therefore became involved with the committee looking after site selection and the selling of shares. As an RM councillor and community-minded person I believed the barns would benefit our area.

Discussions and a public meeting with representation of Heartland Livestock led us to believe that we were indeed lucky people to have Heartland build their first hog

Letter

operation in our area.

My brother decided to sell 40 acres for the sow barn. Eventually we decided to sell 40 acres for the weaner barns on a quarter section of land three miles west of our yard.

The following is a list of the changes and benefits we understood having this size of hog barn close by would mean and what has actually come to pass:

1. The lagoon would be straw-covered and produce very little odour.

We found out this is very different. When the lagoons are agitated each fall the straw goes to the bottom. Therefore the company no longer wants to cover them. The odour problems occur the opposite of when you might think. When the wind is blowing it keeps things more stirred up but as it calms down between 9 and 11 p.m. a very rank odour descends upon us since the farmyard is at a lower elevation. We are forced inside and

must close all the windows for the night. We no longer invite people over for a summer campfire. Anyone working in the fields within a mile finds it hard to stomach the smell. The unfortunate person in the grain truck on a warm day in harvest must tolerate a cab full of flies along with the smell.

In the fall the pits are emptied and the manure injected anytime after the crop is off. This year it was the Thanksgiving weekend. The first few years the trucks hauled directly from the lagoon (24 hrs/day). Even when conditions weren't right they kept on going leaving rutted fields and rocks popped out on top. A hose with a maximum reach of three miles is now used to transport the manure to the field where it is injected with a three point hitch cultivator. This also means the smell is that much closer. People living seven miles away have complained about the smell.

2. Trees would be planted as a windbreak around each site to lessen air movement.

Trees were planted - almost immediately without proper site preparation, weeding and watering. Today there are strips of mostly weeds with 20 percent or so of the trees surviving.

3. Manure would be applied to land in a two mile radius free-of-charge.

They quickly decided that anyone wanting manure would pay approximately \$15/acre. Soil tests showed that the nutrient quality of the manure was half of what they thought it would be.

4. There would be employment opportunities for 15-20 people. Economic spin-offs for the community would include more children attending school, houses easily sold or rented, increased economic activity.

Most of the people employed at the barn are local women or young single people. Turnover is quite high - very few stay more than two years. Those quitting complain of skin problems from the mandatory showering and breathing difficulties from the ammonia. The only fam-

ily moving in is the barn manager with three children attending school. Economic spin-offs are not as good as hoped. One farmer moves weanlings for the barn. Another has supplied straw for the pits. The RM has had the extra cost of dust control in front of the farms on the roads to the sites.

5. Investors would have priority to supply barley to the barns.

However a feed mill was built 60 miles away (60 miles of typical Saskatchewan highway) and offered less per bushel than could be obtained locally at the elevator or the Alberta feedlots.

6. Water wells within a three mile radius would be tested for water quality each year.

Only one test was done at the beginning, none since.

7. We assumed that like our other farm neighbors that Heartland would respect the

countryside.

Garbage has been one of our biggest headaches. The wind often blows garbage (mostly plastic bags) out of a large open area dumpster over the adjacent fields. Employees and truckers also spread their share of litter from their vehicles. During construction we observed garbage being buried on the site and covered with only a few inches of soil.

Any complaints we've made go largely ignored. The bigwigs are far away in Regina. To sum it all up I very much regret that we became a part of letting this operation set-up in our community. It simply has not been worth it. When the day comes to sell our farm I seriously wonder who would buy it and put up with the odour and other problems.

Glenn Goodfellow
Neilburg, Sask.

First CMAP2 payments are in the mail

Agriculture and Food Minister Rosann Wowchuk announced this week that the final payments under the

said Wowchuk. Wowchuk said that 16,973 Manitoba farmers will receive cheques as a final pay-

under an adjustment for the CMAP2 program. "This adjustment allowed new farmers to claim sales for a full

CMAP2 assistance was cost-shared with the federal government as part of the national farm aid package an-

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