

Southern Michigan Dairies #1, #2, #3 – SHUT DOWN !

All cows are gone. Front gates are padlocked. The three former Vreba-Hoff dairies – taken over last fall by Rabo Agri-finance Bank and its subsidiary Southern Michigan Dairies – are completely shut down.

Out back, out of sight, millions of gallons of liquid manure still fill the lagoons.



March, 2012 – The former Vreba-Hoff facility #2 south of Hudson on US-127 is locked up.

Fifteen years ago in 1997, Vreba-Hoff Dairy Development built its first dairy CAFO on Dillon Hwy. Then a few years later, they built another CAFO, the largest one in the area along US-127. And then they bought a third CAFO, Waldron Dairy on US-127 (the former Mericam Dairy). Over the years, every one of these facilities violated Michigan's law by polluting streams with liquid manure runoff and discharges through field tiles.

Now, Vreba-Hoff is gone, defunct, foreclosed, bankrupt, owing many local vendors and other suppliers millions of dollars.

Now, after 6 months under Rabo-bank operation, Southern Michigan Dairies has removed all cows, locked the main gates.

Now, 3 streams that flow from those facilities have been added to Michigan's list of "impaired waters."

Now, the shuttered CAFOs are acres of brownfields, with millions of gallons of liquid manure still festering in 17 lagoons.

Jobs? Economic development? A boon to the community?

And if the CAFOs are sold – what can we expect?

THE SAME STORY ALL OVER AGAIN !

New push for Great Lakes protection, money to prevent agricultural runoff

In Michigan, new grant money is aimed at changing manure management practices. Runoff from manure and fertilizer has been identified as a major contributor to the phosphorus pollution that feeds Great Lakes algae blooms.

USDA grants \$2 million to MI, OH, IN

On March 17, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack visited SE Michigan to announce \$2 million in grants to farmers in an effort to combat the blooms in Lake Erie. A toxic algae in Lake Erie has disrupted boating, fishing and swimming in recent years, with major losses throughout the recreation industry in Ohio and SE Michigan.

The USDA grants will support practices that reduce phosphorus runoff, including incorporating fertilizer and manure, planting buffers and filter strips, and planting cover crops.

Great Lakes Coalition supports Farm Bill protections

Also in mid-March, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition published a report, "The Case for Federal Farm Bill Conservation Programs in the Great Lakes Region," urging legislators to increase conservation funding in the Farm Bill to protect natural resources and the Great Lakes.

SMD fined \$24,500

In January, Southern Michigan Dairies was fined \$24,500 for violating its deadline to close the failed concrete manure lagoon at SMD facility #1 on Dillon Hwy. The DEQ letter to Mark Fischels, President of SMD, noted the lagoon was not properly closed until Dec 27, 2011 – 56 days past the negotiated deadline.

UPDATE: SMD CAFO Permits (hearing was Feb. 1) – NO ACTION YET (CAFO permits can be issued for facilities with no animals)

Bruinsma cited for violations: "deficiencies" in manure plans still not fixed after 2 years

Bruinsma Dairy CAFO, Morenci, was cited by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality for violating Part 31, Michigan's Water Resources Protection of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, and for violating the CAFO's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit.

Numerous deficiencies

The violations have been ongoing since 2010, when Bruinsma submitted a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) detailing its manure-management practices to protect water quality in connection with a reapplication for the NPDES permit. DEQ found "numerous deficiencies" in the CNMP and required Bruinsma to resubmit a CNMP by Dec 31, 2010.

Bruinsma informed DEQ on Dec 6, 2010 it would submit the CNMP by June 1, 2011. No CNMP was ever submitted.

Next deadline – August 12, 2012

In a letter to Bruinsma in July last year, DEQ noted the prolonged violations and set yet another date, Aug 12, 2012, for Bruinsma to submit an adequate CNMP.

Spring manure spraying in gear once again – neighbors suffer



March 28, 2012 – A beautiful spring day in Michigan. But stench is in the air and neighbors gag. Here Hartland Farms' sprayer fills up via manure umbilical to semi-tanker hauler.

Court orders FDA to follow through on penicillin, tetracycline ban in livestock

The Food and Drug Administration was ordered by a Federal Court in Manhattan to follow through on a 37-year old plan to ban the use of penicillin and two forms of tetracycline for growth promotion in livestock.

The widespread use of those antibiotics, often in industrial-sized livestock operations, has been linked to drug-resistant "superbugs" that can spread to humans.

In 1977 the FDA proposed prohibiting the non-therapeutic use of those important antibiotics in animals, but delayed all these years in implementing the plan. Some months ago the FDA banned the use of several other antibiotics (see last Newsletter).

No hearings, no action

But the FDA never followed up on the proposed ban of penicillin and tetracycline, never conducted public hearings or took any other action.

In May last year the Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental groups brought the suit against FDA that led to the Court ruling.

Judge Theodore H. Katz wrote, "The scientific evidence of the risks to human health from the widespread use of antibiotics in livestock has grown...If, at the hearing, the drug sponsors fail to show that the use of the drugs is safe, the [FDA] Commissioner must issue a withdrawal order."

(Source: *Washington Post*, March 22, 2012)

Michigan agriculture contributes \$71.3 billion to state's economy? – NONSENSE!

You hear the number – \$71.3 billion! – in ag meetings and press releases, from Farm Bureau over and over, picked up by politicians boosting Michigan agriculture.

A gigantic number! And, as it turns out, an imaginary number.

The real number? \$2.73 billion. Still a fine number. Just 30X smaller.

Bless *Bridge Magazine* for some serious scrutiny of the source – an MSU Product Center report on Michigan's "Agri-Food and Agri-Energy System." Honors to *Bridge Magazine* for detailed analysis of federal GDP data, showing the much greater value of Michigan's manufacturing sector, \$58.7 billion, and (take a deep breath here) the almost equal value of arts and recreation in Michigan, \$2.71 billion.

Agriculture contributes significantly to Michigan's economy, no doubt about it. But, when you hear that \$71.3 billion, think \$2.73 billion – that's the real number.

Excerpted, with our emphasis, from: *Bridge Magazine* (Sept 2011)

Melissa Preddy, "Agriculture's Growth Real, But Not The Stuff Of Myth"

... Agriculture has potent political myth.

Google "Michigan agriculture \$71.3 billion" and more than 6,100 hits pop up.

The claim is hogwash, state some economists. Only by the greatest stretch – including grocery stores, for example, or the trucks that haul produce as "agriculture" businesses – can the economic reach of Michigan's farming community be deemed so pervasive. Yet the numbers have been repeated so often that they've taken on a life of their own.

"It's absurd," said Mitch Bean, former director of the House Fiscal Agency and now a partner in Eaton Rapids-based Great Lakes Economic Consulting LLC. "It attributes all sorts of things to the agricultural sector that shouldn't be attributed there. And it way overinflates the impact and influence of the ag sector on the economy."

Federal statistics reflect a more modest contribution of jobs, revenue and growth by the ag sector:

•According to the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis, **agriculture including private crop and animal production, fishing, forestry and hunting in Michigan generated inflation-adjusted GDP of \$2.73 billion in 2010.** GDP measures the total market value of all final goods and services produced. That's up \$1 billion from 2000, but that still moved the industry to only 0.8 percent of the state's GDP in 2010 (up from 0.5 percent in 2000).

By contrast, **\$58.7 billion was generated by the manufacturing sector and \$40 billion from the real estate sector.** In fact, the arts and recreation sector in Michigan – which includes museums, performing arts and gambling – is about on par with agriculture at \$2.71 billion in 2010.

ECCSCM Meetings - 3rd Wednesday of the month, 7:30 p.m. Hudson Community Center (check our website for last-minute changes)

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- that preserves and protects our air, streams and lakes
- that raises animals in a healthy, natural environment, grazing, absorbing sunshine
- that avoids the steady diet of hormones and antibiotics given animals in the crowded, confined conditions of industrial facilities
- that values and protects farmland, the environment and the rural community