

Commissioner Hugoson's "Livestock Friendly" County Designation Unfriendly to Family Farmers, Rural Residents and the Environment

WHY THIS MISNAMED LEGISLATION MUST BE REPEALED:

While family farmers struggle with low prices and access to markets, MN Commissioner of Agriculture Gene Hugoson has created a program that helps corporate-backed factory farms.

State legislation passed in 2002 gave the Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture authority to create a "Livestock Friendly" county program. Commissioner Hugoson is using this authority to further his factory farm agenda by requiring counties to eliminate democratically enacted county feedlot ordinances that limit factory farm expansion.

Hugoson's "Livestock Friendly" designation is designed to promote corporate-backed factory farms. To be given Commissioner Hugoson's so-called "Livestock Friendly" county designation, counties must remove limits on how large livestock operations can be in their county. At least 14 counties have caps on how large livestock operations can be. These county size limits start at 2,500-sow hog operations and 1,000-cow dairy operations. Operations this large are often financed or directly owned by outside investors – for example, a mega dairy operation with a combined total of over 4,200 dairy cows that a New Jersey trust is trying to build in Dodge County.

Hugoson's "Livestock Friendly" county program weakens local control and undermines family farm livestock operations. The application for the "Livestock Friendly" county designation states that county animal unit limits on how large feedlots can be "are not conducive to a viable animal agriculture sector." **But the facts say otherwise.**

County	Animal Unit Cap	Livestock Production Rank	THE TRUTH Animal unit caps and a healthy livestock industry go together when livestock is raised on many small to medium sized family farms, not concentrated on large corporate-backed farms.
Fillmore	2,000 a.u. * (2,000 beef cows)	1st in beef cows**	
Winona	1,500 a.u. * (1,071 dairy cows)	3rd in dairy **	
Blue Earth	3,000 a.u. * (10,000 hogs)	2nd in hogs **	
Morrison	1,000 a.u for hogs, 1,500 a.u other *	4th in dairy, 3rd in beef **	

* MDAs Feb. 2000 report "Summary of Animal-Related Ordinances in Minnesota Counties" ** MDAs "Minnesota Agricultural Statistics 2002"

Outside investors, who the MDA is courting to develop large livestock operations in Minnesota, do not want animal unit caps. Why? Because they do not have to live by them. In Iowa, where there is no local control, 3,500-sow hog operations are common. **Does Commissioner Hugoson think that a state bureaucracy and outside investors know better than locally elected county commissioners what is best for their county?**

What other rights do counties have to give up in order to be "Livestock Friendly?"

The county cannot have a temporary moratorium on feedlot expansion and cannot have any prohibitions on earthen basins for dairy manure. Under Hugoson's scenario, a county that decided to increase its livestock sector by attracting fifteen 100 cow dairies but had a county cap on feedlots of 1,500 animal units would not be "Livestock Friendly". The problem is, Commissioner Hugoson cannot envision a livestock industry in Minnesota that is not based on corporate-backed, factory farms.

The truth is simple:

Hugoson's "Livestock Friendly" county designation paves the way for the LARGEST, corporate-backed FACTORY FARMS to build in Minnesota.

Some questions and answers about why Hugoson's "LIVESTOCK FRIENDLY" county program is UNFRIENDLY TO FAMILY FARMERS, RURAL RESIDENTS & THE ENVIRONMENT

Does the "Livestock Friendly" designation process affect townships?

Yes. In order to be designated "Livestock Friendly" by the Commissioner of Agriculture, counties must submit resolutions or letters from "local units of governments" (i.e. townships) supporting the effort. In the part of the county that is to be designated "Livestock Friendly" there cannot be temporary moratoriums against the construction of feedlots above a certain size. This puts pressure on townships to give up their right to enact temporary moratoriums against the construction of large feedlots, which is often the first step in adopting township zoning ordinances.

What are the average sizes of livestock farms in MN and how does this program help them?

According to MDA's "Minnesota Agricultural Statistics 2002":

- ➔ **96%** of dairy operations in Minnesota are less than 200 cows (280 animal units);
- ➔ **86%** of hog operations are less than 2,000 head (600 animal units);
- ➔ **99.9%** of beef operations are less than 500 head (500 animal units).

Yet Commissioner Hugoson's "Livestock Friendly" designation requires counties to get rid of animal unit caps even though these animal unit caps start at 1,500 animal units. This program does nothing for the small to medium sized family farms which are the overwhelming majority of farms in Minnesota. Instead, **it is designed to benefit a few large corporate interests.**

How does promoting factory farms harm the environment and public health?

Industrialized livestock operations have helped make agriculture the single biggest source of non-point water pollution in the nation, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. As a result, in many rural areas streams are unsafe to fish or swim in and the groundwater is too polluted to drink.

Antibiotics that are important in human use are used extensively for non-therapeutic purposes, such as promoting growth, in large, factory farms. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, as much as 70% of all antibiotics used in the United States are used in confinement livestock operations for non-therapeutic uses. Many scientists believe that this overuse is contributing to the development of "superbugs" or antibiotic resistant bacteria, a serious public health threat.

What is the legislation that enabled Commissioner Hugoson to create this program?

Legislation passed last session (Minn. Stat. 17.101 Subd. 6) entitled "Livestock Development" states simply, "The commissioner shall establish a process, including criteria and standards, to recognize and assist efforts by counties to maintain or expand their livestock sector. A county that meets the criteria may apply to the commissioner to be designated a livestock friendly county."

Are tax breaks and government handouts for factory farms the next step in Hugoson's factory farm agenda? This legislation was originally introduced in 2001 as the "cow-friendly county" program and allowed the MDA to award grants to those counties that wanted to be "cow-friendly." Now there is talk of tying tax breaks for factory farms to the "Livestock Friendly" county program by creating "tax free zones."

Take Action!

For more information call
Land Stewardship Project
at 507-523-3366
or 507-342-2323.

- 1. CALL YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS** and tell them this legislation must be repealed. To get the name and number of your legislators call the Minnesota House of Representatives info line at **800-657-3550** and the Senate info line at **888-234-1112**.
WITHIN THE METRO: **651-296-2146** HOUSE / **651-296-0504** SENATE
- 2. CALL YOUR COUNTY COMMISSIONERS** and tell them that your county should not apply for Hugoson's "Livestock Friendly" designation.