

Old MacDonald had a farm

**The possible impact of proposed
mega dairies and massive pig factories
on the small family farm**



Soil Association



**World Society
for the Protection
of Animals**

Summary

The possible impact of proposed mega dairies and massive pig factories on the small family farm

- ▶ Recent controversial proposals for huge new factory farms in the UK could herald a new phase in the way British farmers keep animals, opening the floodgates to many similar developments, and changing our farming landscape forever.
- ▶ A proposal for a mega dairy at Nocton in Lincolnshire, involving between 3,770 and 8,100 dairy cows, has recently been withdrawn, but would have been the biggest of its kind by far in the UK. If given the go-ahead, the proposed pig factory at Foston in Derbyshire, containing 2,500 breeding sows and around 25,000 young pigs, would likewise be the largest of its kind in the UK.
- ▶ Objections so far have focused on animal health and welfare, and local environmental impacts, but developments like these would produce massive amounts of milk and pork, which could have a dramatic impact on family dairy and pig farms.
- ▶ The 3,770 cows at Nocton would have produced 37.7 million litres of milk each year, enough for 2.5 billion cups of tea. The 2,500 sows at Foston would produce 52,000 pigs each year, and if these were all just made into sausages, they would make over 56 million sausages each year, more than one sausage for every adult in the UK.
- ▶ Massive industrial-scale production could make it impossible for some average size dairy farms in the UK to sell their milk. Had the mega dairy at Nocton been built, even at the lower level of 3,770 cows, it could have forced around 50 smaller, family dairy farms out of business.
- ▶ Based on government figures, around 350 farmers producing pigs could lose all their sales when the pork from Foston hits the market.
- ▶ No one, including the Government and the National Farmers Union, knows just how many farmers will be affected, nor which dairy and pig farmers will have to give up if industrial-scale farming goes ahead – nor do they seem to care.
- ▶ The developers claim they're meeting public demand, but it is wrong to say that the British public are demanding that cows must be kept inside throughout the months they are milked, or that 2,500 mother pigs should spend their entire lives shut up inside a factory.
- ▶ If people believe that cows should be able to graze in green fields, and don't want Britain flooded with factory milk, they can pledge their support for the World Society for the Protection of Animals' 'Not in my cuppa' campaign. And if they believe that pigs should not be kept in massive factories, should not have their tails chopped off, should be able to build nests and spend part of their lives outdoors, they can pledge their support for the Soil Association's 'Not in my banger' campaign.

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Introduction

British farming appears to be about to make a step change in the way in which we farm animals. Many in this country have long looked across the Atlantic with horror at the gigantic animal factories that have spread across America. In the UK we are accustomed to large-scale, industrial livestock production, particularly for pigs and chickens, but most people feel that the idea of thousands of cows or pigs, kept indoors their whole lives, is alien to British farming.

This is strongly reinforced by the way food is sold to us. Milk, butter and cream are sold with pictures of dairy cows eating grass outside under a blue sky, and we imagine pigs digging up grassy paddocks to find food. We assume all farm animals will have the opportunity in their lives to feel the sun on their backs, exhibit natural behaviour, spread their wings or stretch their legs

Even though this view is far from the reality faced by many farm animals, we have so far avoided the worst excesses of mega dairies and massive pig factories. But recently, two controversial proposals for huge factory farms have begun to change all that. These developments are the first of their kind in the UK. They could herald a new phase in the way British farmers keep animals, opening the flood gates to many similar developments, and changing our farming landscape forever. Developments like Nocton and Foston will drive many smaller dairy and pig farmers out of business, and produce milk and pork in ways which most British citizens find unacceptable.

A mega dairy in Lincolnshire?

At Nocton in Lincolnshire, a group of farmers put forward plans for a mega dairy. Their initial plans would have resulted in more than 8,000 dairy cows being kept indoors all the time they are milked, with food brought to them. New cows would be imported from Germany to spend their milking lives indoors. The sheer scale of this proposal led to outrage and widespread opposition. As a result, the proposed factory was reduced in size to just under 4,000 cows, but the developers still wanted, with appropriate planning consent, to increase numbers to 8,000 cows in future. Their plans have now been withdrawn but advocates of mega dairies are confident that future proposals will be submitted. Mega dairies remain a very real threat.

A massive pig factory in Derbyshire?

At Foston in Derbyshire, Midland Pig Producers are proposing to build a new pig factory housing 2,500 sows, along with all of their offspring (around 25,000 at any one time). These pigs would be totally enclosed. They would live the whole of their lives indoors, never seeing the sky, still less a blade of grass. Mother pigs would never have the opportunity to fulfil their overwhelmingly strong desire to build a nest before they give birth to their young.

Once again, the proposal has generated huge opposition.

The environmental and animal welfare arguments

Opposition to both plans for mega dairies like Nocton and pig-farms like Foston has focused on the local impact that these huge developments would have on the environment, on the surrounding countryside and on local people. For Foston, questions were raised about the impact on traffic levels and the risk of accidents, fumes and noise, and at Nocton about the risks of water pollution.

Indeed, at Nocton, the Environment Agency opposed the development because of the threat it posed to fresh water. An Environment Agency spokeswoman, quoted in the *Lincolnshire Echo* on 19 January 2011 ('Super-dairy plans pose an unacceptable risk of pollution to water supplies') said:

"Our role is to assess the environmental impact and we consider the risk to groundwater to be unacceptable, based on the plans for managing large amounts of slurry. Groundwater is important for public water supplies. We asked the developer to address this issue in their revised application, but our original concerns remain. This location is inappropriate for this proposed development because of the environmental sensitivity."

At Foston, the local planning authority has asked the developers for additional information, including about the impact on the environment.

Public opposition has understandably centred on concerns about animal welfare for dairy cows and pigs kept in these conditions, although these are not

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issues that have to be taken into account by local planning authorities. So far, there has been much less discussion about another aspect of the human impact of these developments, namely on existing dairy farmers and pig farmers, which may also be ignored by the local planning system.

The possible impact on small dairy farms and pig farmers

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Could just one new mega dairy or pig factory, even if bigger than anything we have so far in the UK, really have much impact on existing dairy and pig farmers? It is hard to give definitive figures of the number of existing farmers that might be driven out of business. These investments are being proposed against a background of serious, continuous decline in numbers of UK dairy farms. For example, between 2008 and 2009, 656 dairy farms in the UK closed down – a loss of 12.6 dairy farms each week.

Over recent years, there has also been a serious decline in UK pig production. In the period 1996–98 there were 7.9m pigs in the UK on average, this had fallen to 5.8m in 2001, and to 4.7m, almost half the 1998 figure, by 2009.

But these new mega factories will produce huge quantities of milk and pork. Nocton would have had at least 3,770 cows, Foston would have 2,500 breeding sows. All this new production of pork and milk won't simply disappear. The developers admit they do not expect big increases in demand for

factory farmed milk or pork. So it is reasonable to assume that this new production will simply take the place of milk and pork produced by existing dairy and pig farmers. And those existing farmers who won't be able to sell their milk or pork will go out of business.

We don't know which individual dairy farmers and pig farmers will have to give up if these two new factories ever open. No one knows. Indeed no one promoting these developments really seems to care. The National Farmers Union, who should be defending existing dairy and pig farmers, say these huge new developments are 'worth trying'. And the Government says '...the UK market has a place for 'sustainable intensification' and more traditional production and added-value production, to enable the industry to be competitive on UK, EU and global markets'.

But developers, farmers' leaders (with a few notable exceptions) and Defra ministers do not seem to have bothered to try to identify, still less consult, the farmers that may be driven out of business.

If there are economies of scale, as the developers of Foston and Nocton have previously claimed, then it seems reasonable to assume that it will mainly be the smaller or smallest dairy and pig farms who would suffer.

How many small farms could be affected?

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Foston will contain 2,500 sows. The number of smallest farm holdings that have between them

2,500 sows is about 350.¹

Nocton Dairies' original proposal for 8,100 cows could have displaced 60–100 average sized dairy farms.² Although Nocton Dairies reduced their proposal to 3,770 cows, they are on record as saying that their ultimate intention was to scale up to 8,000 cows.

So, if these two developments had taken sales from the smallest pig farms and average sized dairy farms, around 50 dairy farmers and up to 350 pig farmers could go out of business.

These smaller dairies and pig producers will be ideally suited to serving local markets, and will often represent a family's main or at least an important source of their income. The families running many of these farms will have been producing milk and pork for generations. We can assume that the small number of investors and the companies that want to run new mega dairies and massive pig factories will stand to benefit financially if their projects go ahead, but set alongside that, we believe that the Government, farmers' leaders and the public should consider the terrible impact these developments could have on around 400 traditional family farms.

Will the British public want to drink this milk and eat this pork?

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Customers will need to eat a lot of pork and drink a lot of milk to use the output from factories like Foston or the one proposed at Nocton.

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The 8,000 cows at Nocton, yielding 10K litres per annum on average, would have produced 80 million litres of milk each year. 3,770 cows would have produced 37.7 million litres per annum. If an average cup of tea contains 15ml (0.015 litres) of milk, then 37.7 million litres would make 2.5 billion cuppas (and 80 million litres would make 5.3 billion).

In practice pigs are used to make many products, including ham, bacon, sausages, fillet of pork, spare ribs, pork chops and so on. To give an idea of the scale of the production from Foston, the Soil Association have calculated how many sausages the output of pigs could be used to make in a year. Foston will produce around 52,000 pigs each year, producing about 58 kg of pigmeat each (the actual figure may be higher, depending on the slaughter weight of the pigs). Assuming only high quality sausages containing 80% pig meat were produced (for many sausages it would be only 50–60% meat and animal fat), and a pack of six sausages weighs 400 gm, the 3,016,000 kg of pork from Foston would make 56,553,535 sausages. This is more than one sausage per year for every adult in the UK.

What can we do?

The Soil Association and The World Society for the Protection of Animals believe that the argument used by the developers, that the British public demand the milk and pork these factory farms will produce, is nonsense. The British public are

not demanding that 3,770 or 8,000 cows must be kept inside throughout the months they are milked. Nor are they demanding that 2,500 mother pigs spend their entire lives shut inside a factory. There is no public clamour for anyone to build the biggest ever dairy in the UK, nor for the biggest pig factory.

While the Nocton proposal has been withdrawn, the Foston proposal will still require planning permission, but even then, it will still have to convince supermarkets to buy its products. The constant refrain from those supermarkets is that they only sell what their customers want. Even if the 400 or more farmers that could lose all or part of their livelihoods are not being asked if they want these developments, people do have a vote in this. All of us vote about the food we really want each time we eat – usually three times a day. We want to give people a chance to say if they do not want milk from future Nocton-style developments, or pork from Foston, in their cuppa or in their banger.

Endnotes

1. All those holdings that Defra consider commercial (the link below shows what Defra define as a commercial holding), which had less than or equal to 10 sows in pig and the number of smallest farms which between them have 2,500 pigs is around 350. See www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/landuselivestock/junesurvey/results.htm. Click on the heading for '2009 county level dataset' and there is a tab at the end of the workbook called metadata which describes what Defra class as a commercial holding. (Survey Design & Analysis Branch, Economics & Statistics Programme, Food & Farming Group, Defra.)

2. Nocton Dairies' original proposal for 8,100 cows could have put around 115 average sized dairy farms out of business (based on DairyCo figures of 113 cows as the average herd size on British farms, with each cow producing about 7,000 litres of milk per year). The world market price of milk is around 23ppl – that's below the 24.9ppl break-even cost of the super dairy. That 24.4ppl is significant because, with milk going into the genetic processing markets at 23ppl, it means the super dairy will have to secure a contract with a reasonable premium to give a 10% return on investor capital. The premium can only come from supplying the liquid milk market or supplying the branded dairy product market. In the UK, these premium markets are already fully subscribed, so the super dairy will have to muscle into these and will therefore displace between 60 and 100 existing traditional family farms from the market.

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Support the campaigns

Not in my cuppa

Nocton Dairies wanted to build Britain's first mega dairy, housing thousands of cows in factory conditions with little or no access to outdoor grazing.

The proposal would not only have had a disastrous effect on the well-being of the dairy cows, but would have potentially allowed a new wave of factory farms to change British farming and our countryside forever.

The immediate threat of a mega dairy at Nocton has passed with the withdrawal of the proposal, but other developers have similar plans. If you believe that Britain's cows should be able to graze in fields and you don't want battery milk from factory cows, sign up to WSPA's 'Not in my Cuppa' campaign.

<http://notinmycuppa.com>



Not in my banger

Help us campaign against a dramatic escalation of industrial pig farming in the UK. If we don't act now, thousands of pigs in the future could be kept in massive factories – changing British farming forever. The Soil Association's 'Not in my Banger' campaign says that all pigs in the UK should be allowed the following three basic freedoms:

- ▶ No pigs should have their tails chopped off
- ▶ All pigs should spend at least part of their life outdoors where they can enjoy normal pig behaviour like rooting in the ground
- ▶ When mother pigs give birth they must be able to follow their instincts to build a nest, not be forced into metal crates which severely restrict their movement.

If you agree with us say 'not in my banger' today, sign up below, and start buying pork products which are labelled as 'outdoor bred', 'outdoor reared', 'total outdoor', 'free range' – or to be really sure, organic.

www.soilassociation.org/notinmybanger.aspx





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