

Conversation with Food & Water Watch on May 1, 2014

Participants

- Patty Lovera – Assistant Director, Food & Water Watch
- Doug Lakey – Director of Development, Food & Water Watch
- Eliza Scheffler – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Ms. Lovera and Mr. Lakey.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Food & Water Watch (FWW) about the problems of factory farming in the U.S. and what FWW is working on in this area. Topics covered include:

- FWW's history and structure
- Consolidation in the animal agriculture industry
- FWW's long-term policy goals for animal agriculture and approach to advocacy
- How FWW would use additional funding
- Other organizations working to address issues in animal agriculture

About Food & Water Watch

Food & Water Watch (FWW) was founded in 2005 by former employees of Public Citizen, an advocacy group. Wenonah Hauter, the Executive Director of FWW, had previously served as Director of the Energy and Environment Program at Public Citizen, and Ms. Lovera had served as Deputy Director of this program. Ms. Lovera said that while at Public Citizen, she found that many environmental problems were related to food sourcing. FWW was created as an independent organization to focus on food- and water-related issues.

Ms. Lovera coordinates the FWW Food Policy Team, which consists of:

- Two staff members who lobby and monitor the actions of federal agencies
- Five researchers who analyze government and private sector data and public policy
- FWW also has field organizers active in 16 states who work on all FWW issues.

Consolidation in animal agriculture

FWW believes that the consolidation of the food industry is the root cause of many negative aspects of food production. In much of the food industry, three or four companies control the entire supply chain. This is especially true in animal agriculture.

The hog farming industry provides a good example of the broader trend towards consolidation in animal agriculture. As late as the 1990s, the average hog farmer raised 500 to 1,000 hogs on a farm where other products were grown, including feed for the hogs.

Meat is a low-margin product, which drove buyers to consolidate in order to cut costs. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were several key mergers that significantly lowered the number of hog buyers. Antitrust regulations were not enforced.

The small number of buyers lowered prices. In the mid-1990s, hog farmers began exiting the market in large numbers. Many of the hog farmers that remained in operation dramatically increased their production capacity to compensate. These farms became factory farms, which produced hogs exclusively and usually sold on contract to large meat buyers.

Hogs raised on factory farms are kept indoors and are treated with antibiotics and other drugs. These facilities produce enough manure that it needs to be managed as a waste product (instead of a fertilizer), and they are highly specialized (some farms only keep animals for one portion of their lifecycle). This model greatly decreases animal welfare.

FWW publishes a map (at FactoryFarmMap.org) that shows the concentration of factory farms in the U.S. The map is based on 2007 USDA census of agriculture data.

Long-term policy goals

FWW noted the following goals for animal agriculture reform:

- Restore competition in animal agriculture with the enforcement of anti-trust legislation and better rules for transparency and fair contracting practices
- Regulate feed ingredients and drug treatments given to farm animals
- Reduce overproduction of corn and soy, which are used for feed and therefore prop up the factory farming model
- Preserve meat inspection protocols necessary to protect public health
- Reform Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations and increase enforcement of regulations, such as the Clean Water Act, on factory farms

Legislative advocacy

The FWW Food Team advocates for legislation to address many of the problems of animal agriculture, including public health (particularly antibiotic use), environmental, animal welfare, and economic justice for farmers.

Federal policy

At the federal level, FWW does a lot of defensive work – attempting to block bills that the food industry is trying to pass. At any given time, FWW is monitoring five or six pro-industry bills in Congress. Below are examples of legislative efforts that FWW has defended against:

- In the House, the farm industry is advocating for greater restraints on the EPA. The industry claims that the EPA is over-regulating agriculture. Historically, the EPA has not taken strong regulatory action against large-scale industrialized animal production.
- Due to gridlock in Congress, the last Farm Bill was delayed by two years and almost did not pass. During this time, FWW worked to defeat pro-industry amendments to the bill, including the King Amendment, which was an effort to roll back California's Proposition 2.
- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was a well-intentioned program created by the 1996 Farm Bill to provide government funding for environmental improvements to farmland. In the 2002 Farm Bill, the factory farming industry succeeded in altering EQIP so that the program primarily funded factory farms. With every new Farm Bill, there is a battle between industry and reform groups over EQIP.
- With the last Farm Bill, there was a push from the industry to increase farmer privacy protections by placing limits on what farm information can be solicited or obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. This effort, which was ultimately unsuccessful, would have prevented federal agencies from obtaining information such as the location of a farm, and the number of animals on a farm.
- During the passage of the latest farm bill, FWW advocacy contributed to the defeat of most pro-industry amendments. A few pro-industry policies were passed. A coalition of advocacy groups always works together in the fight against pro-industry legislation.

State policy

There is a lot of movement on food issues at the state level. This year to date, FWW has issued action alerts on 50-60 state bills, including 5-6 "ag gag" bills and GMO labeling bills in more than 10 states. Many of these bills relate to factory farming. Three examples:

1. In Maryland, FWW has invested a lot of time in an attempt to pass the Poultry Fair Share Act. The Act would require poultry companies (not their contract poultry growers, who frequently have extra costs pushed onto them) to pay a per-head cost for each chicken housed near the Bay to cover the costs of cleaning up the waste produced by the chickens.
2. Previously in Maryland, FWW led a successful campaign to prohibit the use of arsenic from chicken feed. Arsenic was fed to chickens to make them grow faster and to produce slightly pinker meat. This practice was long-standing and had been approved by the FDA; however, it resulted in arsenic-laced chicken waste being deposited on the Eastern Shore, and newer studies have shown that it remains in the chicken meat as well. Perdue and the chicken industry had successfully lobbied against previous bills that banned arsenic in chicken feed. FWW organized a full political campaign to pass an arsenic ban, including grassroots work in Baltimore.
3. The meat industry is currently trying to pass "right-to-farm" legislation in many states, which guarantees the right to use accepted farming practices without fear of

lawsuit, regardless of the harm and nuisance they cause to neighboring residents and the community.

Local policy

There are many local efforts to protect communities from the negative local effects of factory farming, including attempts to control farm policy at a local level, or to keep factory farms out of a community altogether. Generally, when local communities implement regulations against factory farming, the meat industry and their allies respond by advocating together at the state level to remove local regulatory power. For example, in Missouri, a bill to limit regulatory control to the state level has been introduced (and defeated) every year for the last ten years. In many other places, similar bills have been passed.

Building public support for legislative reform

Historically, the agriculture industry has had a strong influence on policymakers. FWW recognizes that even if policy proposals are well developed and evidence-based, they will not be successful without popular support. The FWW field organizers work to move public opinion in favor of reform.

FWW organizers aim to increase citizen involvement, from sending an email as part of an advocacy campaign to calling a representative or attending an in-district meeting. FWW is very interested in growing its group of citizen supporters.

Litigation

FWW also uses litigation in its fight against the factory farming system. For example, in Maryland, FWW sued Perdue to take responsibility for the runoff from farms under its control. The suit was not ultimately successful, and FWW believes that more work to build political and popular support on this issue would have been helpful.

To date, FWW has been mainly involved in environmental lawsuits. Anti-trust law is a more difficult venue for reform – traditionally it is used by corporations to sue each other.

Corporate campaigns

FWW usually tries to influence the actions of consumers, not of farmers or corporate purchasers. In some cases, a corporate campaign is the best option for changing the overall situation. For example, during the George W. Bush presidency, there was not a realistic chance of reforming food policy at the agency level. FWW wanted to demonstrate that consumers were interested in buying ethical, healthy food products. FWW conducted a corporate campaign that resulted in Starbucks eliminating rBGH (growth hormone) from its products. The Starbucks policy caused many other companies to stop using products raised with rBGH as well.

Room for more funding

If FWW had more funding, it would:

- Increase its organizing presence in hotspots across the country.
- Invest more money in its communications, especially to keep up with new forms of media.
- Do more research. A lot of research is needed to develop alternatives to the factory farming model.

Other organizations working to reform factory farming

Almost all of FWW's work is conducted in partnership with other groups. Groups working on related issues include:

- Environmental protection groups.
- Economic justice groups and family farm advocacy groups.
- FWW has seen growing interest in factory farming reform from animal welfare groups and more messaging along the lines of 'if you're going to eat meat, do it ethically.'

All of these groups approach the factory farming issue differently. The biggest difference in approach is whether the group focuses on implementing specific improvements to animal welfare, or focuses instead on bringing about systemic change on a large scale. FWW focuses more on advocating for systemic change.

Other resources

- Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production – one of the more comprehensive looks at the various impacts of factory farms; the Commission's final report is online at <http://www.ncifap.org/>.
- Bob Martin, Center for a Livable Future, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health – chair of the Pew Commission and involved with research on food production.
- *Foodopoly*, by Wenonah Hauter (Executive Director of FWW) – provides an overview of FWW's perspective on what has driven the food system towards industrialized production.

All GiveWell conversations are available at <http://www.givewell.org/conversations>