

Several industrial-scale dairies near Boardman, Oregon – many of which feed a Tillamook Creamery Association processing plant in the area – have brought their impacts to the forefront. Threemile Canyon Farms opened in late 1990s – after settling extensive battles with WaterWatch over its water rights – and now has 70,000 cows on one location, making it one of the largest dairies in the country. Three other dairies in the same general area have permits for more than 2,500 cows each. More recently, Lost Valley Farm opened in 2017 with a permit for 30,000 cows, but then went into bankruptcy and shut down after numerous permit violations and water supply problems. Now a Washington-based agribusiness, Easterday, has applied for a permit to put a new dairy and feedlot with 30,000 cows on the former Lost Valley Farm site.

Among the many problems mega-dairies cause is an enormous, concentrated demand on water resources. They need water for crops to feed the cows and to absorb nitrates from the animal waste. They need drinking water for the cows. They need water for washing barns, running machinery, and otherwise operating the dairy. It adds up to the water demands of a medium-sized city. The proposed Easterday dairy would use about 20 million gallons of water per day (as an annual average) – more water than the City of Bend. The water to irrigate crops would come from the Columbia River, which needs all the water it has left for struggling salmon and steelhead. The rest of the water will probably come from groundwater aquifers, even though groundwater in the area is rapidly declining and several subareas have been designated as “Critical Groundwater Areas.” To make things worse, mega-dairies can exploit a loophole in the law that allows unlimited “stockwatering” without a permit – an exemption intended for a time of smaller farms.

Mega-dairies are also major contributors to climate change because the cows and their waste emit large amounts of methane. They also pollute nearby groundwater and surface water if the animal waste is not perfectly managed, drive family farms out of business, and raise animal-welfare concerns such as extreme confinement and excessive production demands.

We support a moratorium on new and expanded mega-dairies in Oregon for the sake of our water supplies as well as our climate, water quality, our economy and animal welfare.