

AnimalOutlook

Changing the World for Animals

Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment in Support of S.B. 583

April 1, 2021

Chair Beyer and Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment:

My name is Erin Wing, and I am Deputy Director of Investigations at Animal Outlook, a non-profit animal protection organization. My role is to lead investigations and research into factory farms and slaughterhouses, exposing hidden abuses and mistreatment that animals are subjected to at animal agriculture facilities across the country. I am writing on behalf of Animal Outlook in support of SB 583, which would enact a moratorium on new or expanding mega-dairies over 2,500 cows.

I worked for two years as an undercover investigator for animal cruelty and over the course of my career, I secured employment at two different dairy factory farms, in Pennsylvania and California, to gather evidence to expose the animal abuse and mistreatment at these facilities. I am writing to you with the hope that my first-hand experience as an employee on factory farms will serve as a cautionary tale for what we would like to avoid taking place in the state of Oregon, a place I call my home.

For far too long, factory farms have essentially been given a free pass to operate however they see fit. Extreme cruelty, disguised as standard industry practice, runs rampant and is kept hidden away from public scrutiny. Yet, over the years, countless undercover investigations—conducted by not only Animal Outlook but numerous other animal advocacy groups—have exposed the awful reality of industrial animal agriculture. During my time undercover, I never once entered a factory farming facility that did not conceal brutal conditions for and abuses of the animals confined inside.

Cows in mega-dairies typically live their entire life indoors in huge buildings, being forced into milking areas by frustrated workers anxious to get thousands of cows through the milking process, essentially driving the cows to the point of collapsing from over-exertion. In mega-dairies, cows often stand on hard concrete, which leads to foot damage and exacerbates

lameness. At a dairy facility I investigated, hoof injuries on cows were simply wrapped in duct tape with no veterinary treatment, an example of cutting corners that is typical of factory farming operations.

Being intensely confined on a large scale also means that massive amounts of antibiotics—which can be passed along to humans—are required to treat common diseases in confined cattle, like mastitis. Cows and calves on factory farms commonly have shocking mortality rates and high rates of injuries and illnesses resulting from lack of care and treatment. Cows in mega-dairies are forcibly impregnated, then robbed of their newborn calves very shortly after they give birth. Each cow experiences this cycle over and over. The male calves of cows in mega-dairies either live very short lives in near-immobility and malnourishment to produce veal, or are abandoned to die.

The larger the dairy facility is, the more lax employers become with animal handling training, as is evidenced by my investigations at Martin Farms in Pennsylvania and Dick Van Dam dairy in California. While undercover, I received no humane handling training during my employment at either facility. Workers untrained to deal with thousands of animals who weigh nearly one ton each is a recipe for disaster. I have documented factory farm employees striking cows with wooden canes and metal pipes, managers of facilities using tractors improperly to drag cows through dirt and feces, and dead or dying cows and calves alike being left out in the hot sun, without food or water, to languish for days on end. A manager at one dairy surreptitiously shot sick or injured cows, butchered them on site and distributed the meat amongst the workers.

At both dairy factory farms I investigated, I also documented cows wading through thick streams of feces and urine in nearly every area they could access. The vast amount of manure produced by mega-dairies—6.5 billion pounds in 2019 alone—has the potential to contaminate community water supplies and private wells with dangerous levels of nitrates. There has been decades-long drinking water contamination in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area, driven in significant part by mega-dairies and irrigated agriculture, demonstrating that existing state laws and regulations have failed to prevent this pollution. Many residents cannot afford expensive water filtration systems or bottled water, but we all need clean water to survive. Our laws and policy must reflect this value.

A mega-dairy moratorium would halt the development of new mega-dairies and prevent the expansion of existing ones. That means that a mega-dairy moratorium would at least ensure that this destructive method of dairy production doesn't spread further within our state and will give us an opportunity to address the existing harms from mega-dairies. Given the gaps in our laws, we need to do more to protect all Oregonians and animals in our state before it is too late. For two years I documented the harmful effects of mega-dairy style factory farming on farmed animals and the devastating impact it has on our environment. The last thing I want as a resident of Oregon is to live in a state where the same horrors I documented while undercover in factory farms in other states are happening here. I write to urge our lawmakers to not make the same mistakes that other states have made in allowing massive, industrial dairy operations to operate with impunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on S.B. 583.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Wing
Deputy Director of Investigations
Animal Outlook