

The Heartland Spirit

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JFAN Emerges to Draw Support Against CAFOs

by Nancy Pfoutz | Staff Writer

Jefferson County Farmers and Neighbors (JFAN) is gathering steam. This group of county residents who oppose Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) initially came together a year and a half ago to oppose a CAFO being built in close proximity to their homes and farms. This winter they joined forces again to combat a CAFO being built in Jefferson County.

Now, once again, they are rising up to address a CAFO being proposed in Batavia to be built by Claude and Mary Greiner of Kalona and which would be located just across the Jefferson County border. With the potential for CAFOs to crop up in greater numbers in Jefferson County, JFAN are reaching out to the community-at-large. They seek to address the potential of CAFOs to negatively impact the clean air, water, property values, and the quality of life in southeast Iowa. JFAN's goals are to raise awareness of the potential threats, recruit eager and active volunteers, and raise funds to fight the proliferation of factory farms.

"This is not just an issue for rabble-rousers," said JFAN President Jim Rubis. "Five years from now, this will be a very different place [in which to live], just like you see in northern Iowa."

Fairfield resident Robert Swanson, secretary for JFAN, noted that his family has lived in Iowa for 100 years, and he completely respects farmers and their stewardship of the land. "We're

simply responding to what's happening in the environment. We're forced to do this," he said.

CAFO facilities can rise up quickly, often without the awareness of its neighbors. If the size of the unit is under 1250 hogs, there are no requirements to notify anyone that a confinement facility is being built.

Alan Marks, who serves as treasurer, noted, "As a community we need to protect ourselves, protect the vision we hold. Do we want Jefferson County to be a CAFO county?"

Rubis pointed out that the tremendous growth and potential witnessed in the county recently, including applications to be designated as a "Great Place" and a "Cultural District", are not compatible with hog confinements.

Marks owns a home in the country and is particularly aware of property values falling when living near a CAFO, as well as losing the right to "quiet enjoyment" of one's home from the fumes emanating from the facilities. Rubis became involved in the CAFO issue upon learning that the proposed confinement near Batavia has the potential to contaminate Cedar Creek, which borders on his property.

Swanson lives in town so ostensibly he wouldn't be affected directly by the CAFOs, but he is concerned about what could happen to Fairfield. "We don't want what we've created here to go down the drain. Anybody with common sense can see that [these CAFOs] are

killing a way of life."

"Think of this," Marks offered. "I can start a factory, place it anywhere, maybe employ two people, create 500 gallons of toxic waste frequently with no requirements of any sort. Is there any other manufacturing facility that would be allowed to do this?"

JFAN's Mission: Get People Active

Communities that have succeeded in turning the CAFO tide have done it through extensive active, consistent involvement from the community as a whole. In Clay County, near Lake Okoboji, homeowners created a legal wall to block CAFOs from being built.

"We need volunteers to create database research, organize rallies, distribute petitions, monitor CAFO activities, and work on long-term legislative remedies," Rubis said. "Until the laws change, these will keep cropping up."

JFAN is also applying for non-profit status to get grant money to help with legal defense situations.

"If we create enough problems for CAFO builders, operators will see that they'll have to put up with nuisance lawsuits. That's the only recourse that's been successful," Swanson said. "Time is of the essence. We have to let people know that we're not going to take it."

JFAN says if anyone wants to volunteer time, make donations or learn more, they can contact jfan@lisco.com or call 209-6600.