Extension Assists with Locating Dairies in Cassia and Minidoka Counties

The Situation
Idaho is ranked 4th in the U.S. for the number of cows in dairies (509,552). In 2007, Idaho’s gross income from dairies was 1,727 billion. An influx of dairies started in the mid 1970’s, with dairies relocating to Gooding, Jerome and Twin Falls Counties from California. The first dairies that were relocated to Idaho had 300 to 1000 cows. There were no regulations, most of the dairies were located close together, and soon expanded from 300 to 3,000 head of milk cows (plus the dry cows and replacements). In the areas that most of the dairies were built, there were 52,000 residents and three major towns. The dairies created a problem of odor, flies, and where to store and spread all the manure.

As new dairies started being built in Cassia County, the University of Idaho Extension Office, in cooperation with an organized group of citizens, took on the challenge of developing a plan that would limit these problems. The basis of the program was to require each dairy to have one acre of land for every two animal units. This required them to own or control 500 acres in order to build a 1,000 cow dairy, or 5,000 acres for a 10,000 cow dairy. The intent was to spread out the dairies through the million acre county.

Our Response
The role of the Extension Office in preventing this problem in Cassia and Minidoka County was to develop a plan and present it to the Planning and Zoning Board. Each Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) plan was evaluated, and the committee was able to testify to the Planning and Zoning Board on its merits and problems.

Today Magic Valley dairies make up 72.3% of the cows in the state, for a total of 394,783 cows that produce $1.24 billion in revenues. Dairies in Gooding, Twin Falls, and Jerome counties have 1 cow for every 2 acres, along with 52,000 people who live in this limited production area. With Cassia County Planning and Zoning Board adopting the CAFO plan that was developed under the direction of the Extension office, it has spread out the 71,162 cows over 1.6 million acres, or 26.7 acres per cow. This breaks down to one cow per 7.39 acres of irrigated farm land. Regulations require ½ acre of land per cow for application for manure.

Program Outcomes
The CAFO plan has had little adverse affect on the residents of Cassia County, while at the same time bringing in two cheese plants, and one dehydrating plant that produces powdered milk. The income produced by the dairy industry in Cassia County is $173 million, and most of it stays in the county.

For More Information
Richard Garrard, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension—Cassia County
1013 West 16th Street
Burley, Idaho 83318
208-878-9461; Fax: 208-878-7862
Email: rgarrard@uidaho.edu
52-08rgarrard-dairies.doc
11/08