



Texas Association of Dairymen

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WATER STUDIES SHOULD BE BASED ON ALL THE FACTS

By John Cowan

The City of Waco recently loudly proclaimed the results – the preliminary results – of a “comprehensive” study of Lake Waco’s water quality.

To the surprise of no one in Erath and surrounding counties, the studied paid for by the city once again attempted to pin Lake Waco’s water quality problems solely on the dairy industry.

In the days following the study’s release, the Texas Association of Dairymen and other interested parties, including environmental regulators, have found flaws in the study large enough for a Holstein to walk through. It is a skewed analysis using a flawed methodology and incomplete data.

Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) in the Bosque watershed are held to stricter standards than any other CAFOs in the United States. Dairies in this area understand their responsibility to do the best job possible to prevent any harmful release of pollutants from their farms.

Meanwhile, another report released last week by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality provided an update on the numerous programs dairies participate in – some mandatory and some voluntary – in the watershed.

The bottom line – while these programs are making a difference, it’s too early for all water quality goals to be met. This makes sense. The Total Maximum Daily Load implementation plan, which determines acceptable nutrient levels in order to meet water quality goals, was passed in December 2002.

Nutrient levels in the North and Upper North Bosque Rivers didn’t rise overnight, and it will take time for them to fall.

The release of the TCEQ’s study should be a reminder that safe, quality drinking water is an issue too serious for decisions to be made based on studies such as the one paid for by the City of Waco, which presents out-of-date and narrowly focused data as objective science.

The Texas Association of Dairymen will continue to speak up in support of dairy farmers who do everything required of them by state and federal regulators. We also will continue to urge all dairy farmers to comply with rules and regulations that govern the industry.

Dairies that violate state or federal regulations should be held accountable. It’s the bad actors that unfairly give the entire dairy industry a black eye.

Some downstream won’t be satisfied short of shutting down all dairies in the Lake Waco watershed. That idea is extreme, unrealistic and shortsighted. While the dairies and the City of Waco may never fully resolve their differences, they must find a way to coexist.

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The only people benefiting from the city's lawsuit against the dairies are the lawyers involved. It sure isn't the Waco taxpayers, who are footing the city's legal bills, or the defendant dairy farmers who are watching their own legal bills mount.

We once again are encouraging both sides to sit down away from the courtroom and discuss reasonable solutions to water quality issues.

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John Cowan is the executive director of the Texas Association of Dairymen, Inc. (www.milk4texas.org).

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