



TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF DAIRYMEN

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HELPING CENTRAL TEXAS DAIRIES BENEFITS THE WHOLE INDUSTRY

By John Cowan

Is a partial glass of milk half empty or half full? It depends on your perspective, of course. The same can be said of the response by the Texas Association of Dairymen to the City of Waco's lawsuit against 13 Central Texas dairy producers over alleged water quality issues in Lake Waco.

Some would say TAD has not done enough; others would say that TAD is concentrating too much on a small group of dairymen in one area of the state.

As executive director of the Texas Association of Dairymen, I want to explain what TAD is doing in regard to this lawsuit. More importantly, I want to clarify why our organization's actions should be supported by all dairy producers in Texas, regardless of their location, as well as residents of counties whose economies depend on the dairy industry.

First, it's important to understand that TAD itself is not a party to the lawsuit. In spite of our very strong support for and desire to assist these dairy producers, TAD is being extremely cautious not to say or do anything that could detrimentally impact the legal defenses they are developing.

We can say, however, that our organization believes the lawsuit is the wrong approach to protecting water quality in Lake Waco watershed. Scientific studies have found that a number of sources, including the City of Waco itself, may be contributing to the growth of aquatic vegetation in Lake Waco.

TAD and its members are committed to water quality in Texas and strive to be good environmental stewards. Water quality has improved substantially in the Bosque watershed the last decade, thanks in part to the dairy industry's willingness to embrace new technologies and practices that make less of an impact on the environment.

The City of Waco, however, points, the finger of blame solely at the dairy industry. TAD believes it must be actively involved in this attack not just against specific Central Texas dairy farmers, but against the industry as a whole.

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Therefore, TAD is providing some financial assistance to the 13 defendant dairies. So are producers across the southwest, through the Greater Southwest Milk Marketing Agency. The financial aid helps defray some – but certainly not all – of the expenses incurred by the individual dairy producers in preparing their defense.

The TAD board of directors sees this financial assistance as investment in the future of the state's dairy industry. The lawsuit raises legal issues that represent a substantial threat to our all dairies, whether they are located in Central Texas, East Texas, the Panhandle or elsewhere. Decisions in these cases could set precedents for harmful policies or requirements that have statewide, and perhaps national, ramifications on how we operate our dairy businesses.

The fallout from this lawsuit could curtail a producer's livelihood or even force them out of business. If that happens, local economies could be devastated.

The loss of one 1,000-cow dairy farm from Texas would imply a loss of \$1.35 million in total personal income, 61 dairy and dairy-related jobs and \$113,238 in potential county taxes, according to a study by Tarleton State University.

The Texas Association of Dairymen's mission is to represent all our state's dairy cooperatives and to work for the interest and benefit of all Texas dairy farmers. The TAD board of directors believes that providing financial help and any other assistance we can to these dairymen in Central Texas falls under TAD's mission.

These 13 dairy farmers are shouldering legal bills, coping with stress and facing an uncertain future. They're doing it not only for themselves, but on behalf of all dairy producers in Texas.

They deserve the support and thanks of the entire dairy industry.

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

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