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New report details how factory farms have displaced small farmers

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Eco Catholic

Washington-based Food and Water Watch has released a report titled "Factory Farm Nation: How America Turned Its Livestock Farms into Factories." The report includes a map that pinpoints the areas nationally, by state and county, with the highest numbers of factory farm livestock.

"Between 1997 and 2007, there was a geographic and economic shift in where and how food is raised in the United States," the report states. "Even a few decades ago, there were small- and medium-sized dairy, cattle and hog farms dispersed all across the country. Today, these operations are disappearing. The remaining operations are primarily large-scale factory farms that are concentrated in specific regions, states and even counties where the thousands of animals on each farm can produce more sewage than most large cities, overwhelming the capacity of rural communities to cope with the environmental and public health burdens.

"Over the last two decades, small- and medium-scale livestock farms have given way to factory farms that confine thousands of cows, hogs and chickens in tightly packed facilities. Farmers have adopted factory-farming practices largely at the behest of the largest meatpackers, pork processors, poultry companies and dairy processors. The largest of these agribusinesses are practically monopolies, controlling what consumers get to eat, what they pay for groceries and what prices farmers receive for their livestock. This unchecked agribusiness power and misguided farm policies have pressed livestock producers to become significantly larger and adopt more intensive practices. Despite ballooning in size, many livestock producers are just squeezing by because the real price of beef cattle, hogs and milk has been falling for decades."

Food and Water Watch's report said a number of areas are fighting back against agricultural corporations,

including the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Indiana and Nebraska.

Food & Water Watch analyzed U.S. Department of Agriculture Census data from 1997, 2002 and the most current census, 2007, for beef and dairy cattle, hogs, broiler meat chickens and egg-laying operations, and found the total number of livestock on the largest factory farms rose by more than 20 percent between 2002 and 2007--while the number of dairy cows and broiler chickens nearly doubled during the same time, making them the fastest-growing population of factory farmed animals.

Despite the fact that the number of livestock farms across the country has decreased, the Food & Water Watch Factory Farm Map illustrates that big farms are getting bigger, with specific regions and states bearing the brunt of intensive animal production.

"While more and more light is being shed on the ways our food system is broken and consumers are increasingly interested in knowing where their food comes from, there is still a lot of information that's hidden from public view," said Wenonah Hauter, Food & Water Watch's executive director. "The purpose of the Factory Farm Map is to provide an easy-to-use tool that anyone can access to learn more about where our food is really coming from."

Key findings in Food & Water Watch's analysis and map show:

- * In five years, total animals on factory farms grew by 5 million, or more than 20 percent.
- * Cows on factory dairy farms nearly doubled from 2.5 million cows in 1997 to 4.9 million in 2007. Factory dairy farms growth in western states like Idaho, California, New Mexico and Texas shifted the dairy industry away from traditional states like Wisconsin, New York and Michigan.
- * Beef cattle on industrial feedlots rose 17 percent from 2002 to 2007 - adding about 1,100 beef cattle to feedlots every day for five years.

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- * Nationally, about 5,000 hogs were added to factory farms every day for the past decade.
- * The growth of industrial broiler chicken production added 5,800 chickens every hour over the past decade.
- * Egg laying hens on factory farms increased by one-quarter over the decade.
- * The average size of factory farms increased by 9 percent in five

years, cramming more animals into each operation.

* In 2007, the average factory-farmed dairy held nearly 1,500 cows and the average beef feedlot held 3,800 beef cattle.

* The average size of hog factory farms increased by 42 percent over a decade.

* Five states with the largest broiler chicken operations average more than 200,000 birds per factory farm.

* Over a decade, average-sized layer chicken operations have grown by 53.7 percent to 614,000 in 2007.

Food & Water Watch released a companion report, Factory Farm Nation, which explains the forces driving factory farms, as well as the environmental, public health, and economic consequences of this type of animal production. The report also examines the causes for industrial-scale livestock and the demise of small and medium farms.

"This map shows the extent to which factory farms have taken over farming and our communities," said Robby Kenner, director of the Academy Award-nominated film Food, Inc. "Through the Factory Farm Map, Food & Water Watch is shining a spotlight on the mega-corporations that need to be held accountable for the damage they're doing to our health, environment and rural economies."

In addition to the map itself, the Website ranks the top concentrations of factory farmed livestock nationwide as well as by state and county. It features a newsfeed for monitoring local and national factory farm news and social media tools that allow users to share the map and its data via Facebook, Twitter, email and RSS feed. The Factory Farm Map website includes a widget that bloggers and other websites can embed on their sites and a variety of other online tools for activists to spread the word and encourage local, regional or national action.

"Whether you live near a factory farm and are subject to the groundwater contamination or air pollution it causes, or live thousands of miles away and eat the meat or eggs from potentially unsafe facilities, very few people are spared the risk that these operations bring," said Hauter. "The Factory Farm Map arms consumers with critical information about how our food is being produced and what we need to do to chart a course to a more sustainable food system."

Food & Water Watch is a non-profit organization that advocates for common sense policies that will result in healthy, safe food and access to safe and affordable drinking water.

The entire report can be downloaded as a .pdf file from the site.

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