

Ronald Visser

Ronald Visser

Go on a tour! Riverview does them on every dairy. This is the best way to fully understand the dairy operation.

What you will see is:

A great cow environment-the barns are designed with cow comfort as top priority. The cows are calm when milking. They have access to feed, water, and a bed all day.

A great employee culture-the team is professional, hardworking and loves the cows.

A clean site-the farm is well organized, kept clean and well maintained.

A great manure plan-the manure lagoons are covered to control odor and to keep precipitation and manure separate; the lagoons have plenty of storage capacity-14 months. You might see manure injected into the soil after harvesting in the fall.

No rodents-the clean facility along with a pest control program keeps rodents in check.

Very few flies-the clean facility, constant air flow in the barn and a fly control program limit the flies.

My parents built a new 60 cow tie-stall barn in 1973 when I was 3 years old. I've been told that our county had 175 dairy farms at the time. 7 milk processors competed for our milk. Today, none of those farms have dairy cows. The entire dairy infrastructure (processing, veterinarians, nutritionists, consultants, ag lenders-dairy, equipment dealers/repairs, etc.) is gone. I have watched a similar transition in the far north of Minnesota, all of North Dakota and Black Hill area in South Dakota. Very few dairy farms remain in these areas, and the infrastructure is far away or gone. Milk processing left drove most of this.

I have spent my entire life in the dairy industry. I have witnessed the transition from tie-stall barns to larger free-stall barns in the Midwest. Most of the traditional cow regions in the Midwest and Northeast are now a blend of both. This trend will continue as small tie-stall barns get replaced with larger free-stall barns. The dairy infrastructure here is good.

The dairy industry has had regions in Idaho, Texas, Indiana, South Dakota and Kansas where the dairy infrastructure took off or is taking off. The harsh reality is that these new pockets of dairy rarely include the addition of small dairy farms. What we have currently in the United States dairy industry (and Global) are traditional cow regions, areas that are losing and areas that are gaining.

Riverview plays a huge role in maintaining a healthy dairy infrastructure in Minnesota. The dairy industry in Minnesota is stronger because of Riverview. Making it more difficult, or impossible, for Riverview, or any other dairy operation, to obtain permits to operate in Minnesota will result in the movement of dairy infrastructure and the dairy industry somewhere else. Making it less difficult for

Riverview, or any other dairy operation, to obtain permits to operate in Minnesota will result in the movement of dairy infrastructure and the dairy industry into Minnesota.

The dairy industry is no different than any other industry as it relates to the environment. We have become better stewards of the land through knowledge and regulations. You can still find people or businesses that have complete disregard for the environment. The next level for me is those that are willing to follow the rules. Most farmers that I know are above these levels as they do their best to be efficient and follow practices that are positive for the environment. The next level for me is doing things to improve the environment that add cost to their business. The ultimate level is where you can find Riverview. The environmental impact is considered in every decision that they make, often resulting in additional costs and reduced efficiency.

I would like to see the dairy industry grow in my home state of Minnesota. I live a mile from a Riverview site. I breathe the air and drink the water from my well. Yes, I appreciate the protections in place for our environment. The rules need to be in place and verified for the first two levels mentioned in the previous paragraph. We don't need additional regulations for those like Riverview at the ultimate level. We do need to explore ways to make it easier (or an option) to grow for those "good farmers" at level 3 or 4 above. I don't see that right now in Minnesota. I do see our neighboring states provide this opportunity.

Riverview plays a huge role in supporting other agriculture infrastructure and other agricultural industries in Minnesota as well. The farmers next to the dairy benefit in many ways: manure as fertilizer for improved soil health, additional cropping options with corn silage and alfalfa haylage, and use of machinery and labor during forage harvest and manure application. This reaches further with the use of by-products from corn and soybean processing as food sources for dairy cows.

The additional cows proposed as part of this expansion are not introducing anything new or untested. Riverview has extensive experience managing operations of this size safely and responsibly. The current Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) process is doing exactly what it is intended to do—evaluating potential impacts and ensuring environmental protections are in place. Based on the proven track record of Riverview and the safeguards provided through the EAW process; this expansion does not warrant a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The existing environmental review process already provides adequate protection for Minnesota's natural resources while allowing responsible agricultural operations to move forward. Riverview Farms has shown that agricultural growth and strong environmental stewardship can go hand in hand. I respectfully encourage the MPCA to consider their outstanding environmental record and support the proposed West River Dairy expansion. Thank you for your time and consideration, and for the important work you do to protect Minnesota's environment.