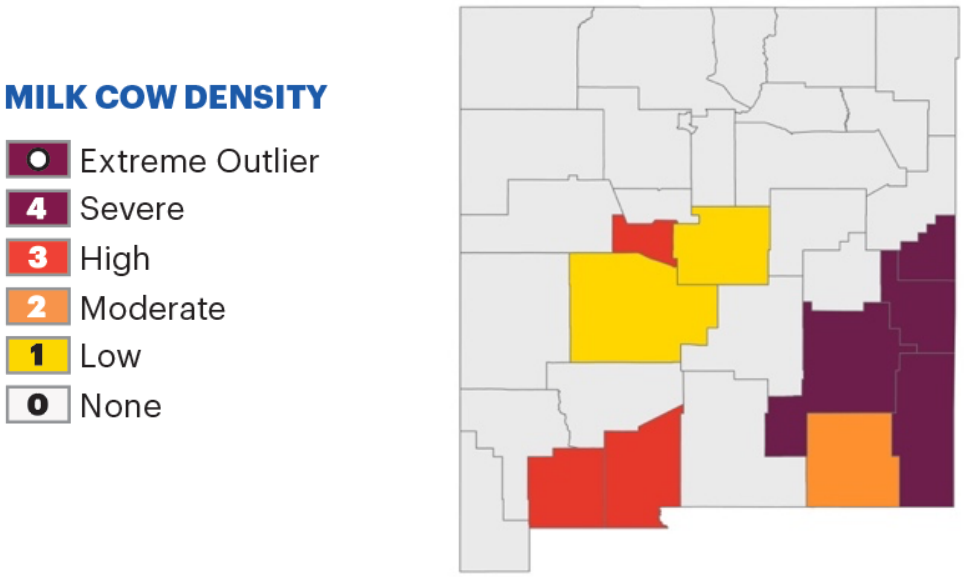
Factory Farm Nation: New Mexico's Mega-Dairy Problem

New Mexico's mega-dairies are getting larger, producing extraordinary amounts of manure waste. This manure is typically not treated before being dumped into the environment, where it fouls rivers and streams, pollutes drinking water, and fuels climate change.

Meanwhile, state and federal policies and incentives continue to prop up Big Ag's factory farm model at the expense of family-scale farms, which are collapsing in alarming numbers. New Mexico must ban new factory farms and the expansion of existing ones, and revamp farm policies to build a food system that works for everyone.

Milk Cows on New Mexico's Mega-Dairies



Source: Food & Water Watch analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture

New Mexico's Mega-Dairies Harm the Environment and Rural Communities

In 2022, New Mexico had 280,066 dairy cows living on mega-dairies.[1] Together, these mega-dairies produce 11.5 billion pounds of manure annually — four times as much as the state's human population. This is enough manure to fill 7.6 Olympic-sized swimming pools *each day*.

info@fwwatch.org
202.683.2500 (DC)
510.922.0720 (CA)
foodandwaterwatch.org

SEPTEMBER 2024

Untreated manure is often spread on farmland, and surplus manure can create runoff that pollutes soil and water.[2] Moreover, manure management practices like liquid storage (common on mega-dairies) can release significant amounts of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.[3] Factory farms release additional hazardous pollutants like ammonia and nitrogen oxides that worsen air quality for nearby residents. These factory farms have long been disproportionately located in low-income and non-white areas, creating an environmental justice crisis.[4] In addition to these health hazards, residents near mega-dairies and other factory farms report foul odors and flies that keep them from enjoying the outdoors or even opening their windows.[5]

New Mexico Is Bleeding Family-Scale Dairies

Nowhere is the shift from family-scale to factory operations more apparent than in the dairy industry, where consolidation occurred at a faster pace than in almost every other agricultural sector.[6] New Mexico's mega-dairies continue to expand, each confining an average of 3,685 cows in 2022 — 20 percent more than just five years earlier. This makes New Mexico fifth in the U.S. for average mega-dairy size.

As mega-dairies expand, smaller, family-scale dairies struggle to survive. New Mexico saw the total number of family-scale dairies fall by 44 percent from 2017 to 2022 alone. The loss of family-scale farms harms rural communities, with the rise in factory farms linked to a host of social and economic declines, from higher poverty rates to out-migration.[7]

We Can Fix Our Factory Farm Problem

We need a complete overhaul of our federal farm policies so that they work for farmers and consumers — not agribusiness giants — while reducing livestock's climate footprint. This must include:

- An immediate, national ban on new factory farms and on the expansion of existing ones;
- Research and funding to help current factory farms transition to smaller, more sustainable crop and/or livestock systems; and
- Investment to expand local markets and build the infrastructure needed to help farmers bring their products to market.

While we work toward these goals, New Mexico must take immediate action by:

- Enacting a moratorium on new and expanding factory farms;
- Stopping the expansion of industry scams like factory farm gas that only further entrench factory farms;
- Reining in water usage by existing factory farms by updating drought plans to include response actions specific to mega-dairies; and
- Denying water permit applications for mega-dairies while prioritizing residential drinking water and family-scale agriculture over factory farm use.

Endnotes

1 For methodology, see Food & Water Watch (FWW), "Factory Farm Nation: 2024 Edition." September 2024.

2 Graham, Jay P. and Keeve E. Nachman. "Managing waste from confined animal feeding operations in the United States: The need for sanitary reform." *Journal of Water and Health*. Vol. 8, No. 4. December 2010 at 649 to 651 and 654; Yang, Qichun et al. "Spatiotemporal patterns of livestock manure nutrient production in the conterminous United States from 1930 to 2012." *Science of the Total Environment.* October 2015 at 14 to 20.

3 See FWW. "Factory Farms, Fracking, and the Methane Emergency." July 2024.

4 Katz, Jamie et al. "Leadership Council for Justice and Accountability, Central Valley Defenders for Clean Water & Air, Animal Legal Defense Fund, and Food & Water Watch Comments on Proposed Amendments to the Low Carbon Fuel Standard." Submitted to the California Air Resources Board. February 20, 2023 at 2 to 4. Available at https://www.arb.ca.gov/lispub/comm/iframe_bccomdisp.php?listname=lcfs2024&comment_num=7060&virt_num=.

5 *Ibid*. at 7; Weida, William J. The Colorado College. "A synopsis of potential impacts from dairies on a regional economy." March 2003 at 1 to 2; Border 2012 Texas-New Mexico-Chihuahua Regional Work Group Public Meeting. Minutes. Anthony, New Mexico. November 4, 2010 at 2 to 3.

6 MacDonald, James M. et al. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. "Consolidation in U.S. Dairy Farming." Economic Research Report No. 274. July 2020 at 11.

7 Lobao, Linda and Curtis W. Stofferahn. "The community effects of industrialized farming: Social science research and challenges to corporate farming laws." *Agriculture and Human Values*. Vol. 25, Iss. 2. June 2008 at 220 to 221 and 225; Durrenberger, E. Paul and Kendall M. Thu. "The expansion of large scale hog farming in Iowa: The applicability of Goldschmidt's findings fifty years later." *Human Organization*. Vol. 55, No. 4. Winter 1996 at 411 to 412; Lyson, Thomas A. and Rick Welsh. "Agricultural industrialization, anticorporate farming laws, and rural community welfare." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space.* Vol. 37, Iss. 8. August 1, 2005 at 1487 to 1488.