

Proposed dairy breeds debate



SHOWING THEIR SUPPORT: About 200 of the 700 people who attended two public hearings for Rosendale Dairy wore blue Rosendale Dairy T-shirts and hats to show their support for the large dairy. The hearings were held at Royal Ridges in Ripon on Jan. 22.

By **FRAN O'LEARY**

NEARLY 700 dairy farmers, neighbors, concerned citizens and agribusiness people attended two public hearings in Ripon on Jan. 22 for Rosendale Dairy's Environmental Impact Study and Wisconsin Discharge Elimination System permit. If approved, the operation would eventually become Wisconsin's largest dairy farm.

About 50 people spoke for and against the expansion. A majority of those in attendance were there to show support for Rosendale Dairy, including dozens of large dairy producers from across the state. A couple hundred people wore blue Rosendale Dairy T-shirts and baseball caps. A couple dozen opposed to the expansion wore red T-shirts and baseball caps that said "No."

Located in western Fond du Lac County, Rosendale Dairy is owned by Jim Ostrom, John Vosters and Todd Willer. In November, the farm was a week away from stocking the newly

Key Points

- Rosendale Dairy plans to expand to 8,000 cows.
- Dozens of producers attended hearings in support of the dairy.
- The DNR is expected to make a ruling in early March.

built dairy with 4,000 cows when the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources decided to do an Environmental Impact Study after the public raised concerns about the dairy's effects on the environment. The DNR also said they are requiring all new farms with 4,000 cows or more to obtain a Wisconsin Discharge Elimination System, or WDES, permit.

Ostrom and his partners had already obtained all the other required permits.

Rosendale Dairy currently houses 698 cows. If approved, the permit would allow it to expand to 4,000 cows immediately. In about a year, the partners plan to expand to 8,000 cows. The price tag for the entire project is \$70 million.

The partners own 1,800 acres surrounding the dairy and plan to spread manure on an additional 4,000 acres of rented cropland. With 4,000 cows, Rosendale Dairy will produce 46 million gallons of liquid manure per year. The manure will be stored on site in a raised storage facility.

Pollution concerns

Several neighbors of the large dairy and other individuals spoke against the expansion because of the concentration of that much manure in one place and the fact that the partners do not plan to use a manure digester.

"This issue is about pollution to the environment," said Peter McKeever, a Madison attorney representing several neighbors of the farm who are opposed to the dairy expanding. "This is not about how farmers raise cows or produce milk. They have a right to do that as they see fit, but they don't have, in the eyes of the community, a moral, ethical or legal right to pollute the air and water of

their communities. These farms should not be allowed to dump their dirty air and dirty water on the community."

Clean Wisconsin Water Program Director Melissa Mallot echoed McKeever's comments. Mallot expressed concern over the amount of manure that will be spread on area farm fields and the potential contamination that could pose to surface water and groundwater.

"I understand the economies of scale, but this farm is at risk of contaminating air, water and area wells," Mallot said. "If wells are contaminated in the area, who is going to pay for that?"

Mallot added that she is also concerned that the sale of milk from 8,000 cows at Rosendale Dairy will displace many smaller dairy farmers who will find it more difficult to market their milk to area dairy plants.

"We'll potentially lose smaller farms in the area because there is a smaller milk market," she said.

She also expressed concern about the impact the dairy could have on tourism if there was a manure spill that polluted nearby Rush Lake, or if runoff were to find its way into the Fox River or the west branch of the Fond du Lac River.

"We're going to lose tourism dollars," Mallot said.

Strong support

Several producers who operate large dairies around the state spoke on behalf of Rosendale Dairy.

Tom Crave of Crave Brothers LLC in Waterloo said Rosendale Dairy has not polluted the air or the groundwater.

"Wisconsin depends greatly on animal agriculture," Crave said. "Dairy is an economic engine in Wisconsin. Wisconsin needs all sizes of dairies, and Rosendale Dairy deserves to receive their permit."

In addition to Rosendale Dairy, Jim Ostrom also owns Omro Dairy, a 2,200-cow operation in Omro, and Tidy View Dairy in Kaukauna, which has 5,000 cows.

Other dairy producers and veterinarians testified at the hearings that Ostrom has a good track record of taking care of his cows and the land.

Jim Metz of Animart in Beaver Dam said approving the WDES permit for Rosendale Dairy "will help keep dairying strong in Wisconsin."

Other supporters said Rosendale Dairy provides jobs to the community and is a good citizen, making donations to local fire departments and community groups.

According to the DNR, the EIS applies to both phases of the dairy's expansion plans, but Rosendale Dairy would need to reapply for another wastewater discharge permit if the dairy expands to 8,000 cows.

The DNR is expected to make its final determination on the EIS and the WDES permit in early March. Check out www.WisconsinAgriculturist.com for updates.



STATE'S LARGEST DAIRY: If the final permit is approved in early March, Rosendale Dairy will eventually become Wisconsin's biggest dairy with 8,000 cows.