

Don't label all CAFOs as polluters

By JENNIFER VINCENT



I'M not sure who the Michigan Land Use Institute is catering to, but it appears to be a mixed bag.

I had to pick my jaw off the desk when I read a December article by the organization's deputy director, Keith Schneider.

The article is incredibly good. Schneider does a fabulous job of explaining the situation in Kent County, and many other areas of the state, where development is gobbling up farming's No. 1 resource: land. He explains the importance of agriculture to this state. He cites a recent study that reveals the state ought to be investing \$50 million annually to preserve farmland and touts agriculture as a stable economic engine for the state.

So what's my problem?

Just one month before, MLUI was singing a different tune by slamming production animal agriculture — specifically all concentrated animal feeding operations. This hypocrisy has been going on for some time. I'm guessing it's a strategy to secure multiple funding sources by appealing to emotions of well-intended donors.

In my December editorial, I blasted the organization for supporting a tax rebate program in Woodbury County, Iowa, for farmers who switch to organic methods. MLUI praised the idea and did so at the expense of modern production agriculture. That article criticized large farmers and the processors that support them, saying they are to blame for crumbling rural economies and downtown businesses closing.

Large and bad not interchangeable

One major mission of MLUI is to expose CAFOs that violate Michigan's Clean Water Act. A noble cause for sure, since no livestock operation — regardless of size — should be polluting. But MLUI refuses to recognize that most large livestock operations comply with regulations. Throwing a dirty blanket over the industry is misleading.

As you sit down with your books this month, take some time to inventory the organizations and causes you support. If you have questions or concerns, voice them and seek answers. Most importantly, make sure whatever you support is truly in line with your beliefs.

Following are excerpts from a letter that I e-mailed to Mr. Schneider. You can read his reply on page 14:

Keith,

Please explain to me your organization's position on farmland preservation and how that relates to livestock agriculture in Michigan.

I'm having difficulty in understanding just what your organization is trying to do.

In one story, you launch a full-blown attack on large farming operations, saying they are the demise of rural towns and are "industrial, petrochemical-intensive farming," and then a minute later, you go to bat for them as an advocate for farmland preservation.

In your Dec. 12, 2005, article, 'What's

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Good for Farms Is Good for Michigan," you say, "farmland not only aids thriving farms, it is also vital to the state's economy."

Bravo! I couldn't agree with you more. But farmland is not farmland unless you farm it.

You cite the Bradford farm as a prime

candidate for protection and make very compelling arguments to support it.

The Bradfords milk 1,200 cows, as you stated in your article. That makes them a CAFO. In your article you want to protect this farm from development. Yet, your organization has repeatedly attacked large livestock farms. On your Web site, you refer to them as livestock factories that often involve, "numerous cases of catastrophic spills and chronic manure problems."

Time and time again your organization touts farmland preservation, but then slams agriculture.

What is it that MLUI really wants? Is it to preserve land, then get rid of the agriculture that's on it?

The MLUI needs to make a choice. Either stop publicly touting farmland preservation or quit attacking perfectly legal forms of agriculture. I would prefer the latter.

Jennifer Vincent, editor

Customer Visit Program Helps Monsanto Listen and Respond to Farmers' Needs



A Monsanto researcher examines a soybean plant to ensure it is expressing the desired traits.

As a company focused solely on agriculture, Monsanto helps farmers be more successful. That means not only developing new products designed to improve efficiency and increase profitability for farmers, but also listening to their needs.

One of the ways the company does that is through its Customer Visit Program, which brings more than 3,000 farmers a year to Monsanto's research facilities and corporate headquarters in St. Louis to learn about the company's new product pipeline and to provide feedback to Monsanto management.

"Because we're committed to making farmers successful, the Customer Visit Program is one way to provide additional information about the current and future technologies that can help add real value to their farming operations," says Tim Hennessy, Michigan Area Sales Manager for Monsanto.

Research and Development

Small groups of farmers from across the country are flown or bused in to take part in the Customer Visit Program, which starts with a tour of the Monsanto research facilities in Chesterfield, Missouri, just outside of St. Louis. On the tour, farmers see how the new product development process works, and they get an up-close look at some of the latest research projects under way. Current focus areas include:

- Drought and cold tolerance
- Agronomic pest resistance
- Food nutritional enhancements
- Improved animal feed nutrition

"There's a lot of value in knowing your concerns are being heard at the management level of a big company, like Monsanto."

Greg Culp,
Bellefontaine, Ohio farmer

Always follow grain marketing and insect resistance management requirements, and read and follow pesticide label directions.

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At a Glance

- Monsanto is focused solely on agriculture and making farmers successful.
- As part of this commitment, Monsanto hosts a Customer Visit program that supports the company's objective of listening and responding to customer needs.
- More than 3,000 farmers visit Monsanto in St. Louis each year to learn about the new product development process and provide feedback to company management.
- Farmers say the visits are very informative and provide them with a better understanding of what Monsanto is doing to help make them more successful.

Farmers say the visit is a great opportunity to see what really goes on in the research and development process, and they say they come back with a whole new understanding of Monsanto and what the company is doing for them. On average, it takes eight to 10 years and an investment of \$50 million to \$100 million to develop and introduce a new product.

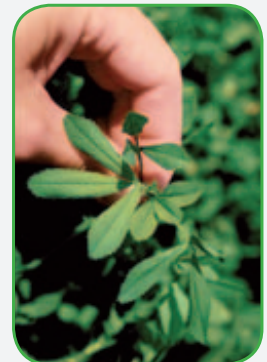
"It's pretty remarkable," says Greg Culp, a farmer and agronomy consultant from Bellefontaine, Ohio. "I was especially impressed with the extent of the research Monsanto is doing. For example, I certainly didn't expect to see them doing MRIs on corn kernels!"

Farmer Opinions Matter

Following the Chesterfield tour, farmers spend the afternoon at Monsanto's corporate headquarters in St. Louis for a free-flowing discussion between the farmers and Monsanto management representatives. The exact subjects discussed vary, based on the information the farmers want to know and the questions they ask, which can include pricing, approach to foreign markets, stacked traits, weed management and the best ways to utilize Monsanto's technology.

"The feedback we get from farmers is invaluable," explains Hennessy. "These visits provide a unique chance to listen and respond to our customers' needs. There are no prepared presentations, we just sit down and discuss the items the customers want to discuss."

"There's a lot of value in knowing your concerns are being heard at a big company, like Monsanto," says Culp. "It's nice to know my opinions matter to them."



Roundup Ready® Alfalfa is one of the new technologies developed at Monsanto's Chesterfield research facilities.

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