



More cows than you can shake a stick at?

IT'S ACTUALLY A good thing that the YouTube video documenting abuse of farm animals at the +3,500 cow Kooyman dairy farm in Chilliwack BC came to light when it did. The Trans Pacific Partnership will soon be front and centre in the public eye. What happened at Kooyman's farm gives us a timely heads-up into what it might be like to experience American-style milk production here in Canada.

There is no doubt about it: the Trans Pacific Partnership would destroy supply management. A shift towards US-style dairy farms would follow as oligopsonistic processors depress farm gate prices, forcing farmers to milk more and more cows just to pay the bills. Once farms become too large for one family to manage, stewardship and sustainability is placed at risk.

After watching the video, co-owner Jeff Kooyman is quoted as saying "Until you've actually seen it, I never could have imagined it being that horrific..." Farmers shouldn't have to imagine how their cows are being

treated. They should be there to see for themselves. On the Kooyman farm, the abuse allegedly resulted "in bleeding and pus-filled sores..." If the person with their eyes on the cows were the farmer, this could not have gone unnoticed.

By my observation, diligent animal husbandry is just the way things are done on a family farm. Thanks to friends in Ontario, I have spent my share of mornings in a milking parlour, happily rising before dawn to tag along. In the quiet of the parlour I sit, breath condensing in air becoming increasingly humid and infused with the scent of cows just risen from their beds. I watch as bexies of black and white beauties file forward, in cow-lady-like fashion, to be milked.

My friend Jim casts his eyes over each as she moves into position. Looking carefully at her feet. Checking her udder and teats for abnormality or signs of mastitis. Glancing up, once the milking unit lets go, to mentally gauge her production against her cycle. And, as he opens the gates,

giving her and her 7 sisters a final, appraising glance before turning his attention to those waiting patiently at the gate.

I enjoy these morning times with my friend and his cows. A lot of observation and learnings: like why one shouldn't ever try to wake the cows with song (ahem... and why animal husbandry is fundamental to good farm stewardship.

I see this echoed in the calf yard. As I break up flakes of clean straw for bedding and try to teach few-day-old calves how to drink water from a bucket, I watch Gladys inspect their navels, "check each one's poop" and encourage them to begin eating from a pail.

I wasn't around when their five children were young, but I'll just bet if any one of them made the mistake of harassing or mistreating a farm animal, they would have had to walk the family plank and that would have been the last time THAT occurred....

My point? On a family farm, respect for the animals and close monitoring

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of herd health comes with the territory. When the farm gets too big for a farmer to stay in touch with his cattle, stewardship suffers.

The myth that efficient family farms have higher costs than large scale, industrial operations is disproven every time serious scholars consider it. Not because corners can't be cut in the short term to add a penny here and there to the corporate bottom line (at the cost of sustainably, ethics, safety, stewardship to name a few).

More importantly, it is because – absent supply management - the pressure to become larger and larger is constant in a market dominated by players that are both oligopsonies and oligopolies (and so have dual superpowers of being able to buy low and sell high). And such expansion means investors, perennially hungry for their pound of flesh.

There can be only one outcome for the consumer.

As the TPP looms closer, smoke and mirror economics dominate reports from right-wing institutes slamming supply management in an attempt to minimize damage at the polls when Canada's entry into the Trans Pacific Partnership destroys policy support for family farms.

Jeff Kooyman says he could not have imagined what was happening in his barns. Both telling and timely, this unfortunate incident provides a glimpse into what the future could hold if “animal protein and constituents facilities” - with more investors and cows than you can shake a stick at - begin to dominate Canadian milk production.

Former Agriculture Minister Gene Whelan put protection of the family farm front and center in his development of Canadian farm policy for

good reason: beyond being efficient, family farms contribute “positive externalities” that go well beyond the food they produce.

Jim and Gladys raised five fine children on their dairy farm: two doctors, a mechanic and (perhaps most significantly) two farmers.

If we don't grow replacement farmers, where are they going to come

from? Family farms are the building blocks of food security and community...

The Harper government – demonstrating a criminal lack of vision and ethics – foresees putting an end to all of that. The Trans Pacific Partnership is the smoking gun. Who is Harper to take apart the future of Canada? **D**



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