



8 Analyse the ILO's Economics

Promises vs. Reality

Factory farms promise communities:

- New jobs
- Influx of money to a community that may be seen as dying
- Better markets for farmers' grain
- More commerce for business
- Population increase
- They will be non-polluters
- No alteration of quality of life

However, in reality:

- Jobs are often limited, low wage, and hazardous. There is generally a high turnover rate.
- Building materials and equipment are bought outside the area as many of these areas are remote and have low populations, which in turn often means that supplies needed by the proponent are not readily available in the community.
- Feed is bought wherever it is cheapest, usually outside the area
- Population declines
- Tourism suffers
- Unemployment and poverty rise
- Small communities have few stores and little shopping to absorb the wages of workers. As a result, money leaves the area.
- Property values decline
- The tax burden on the region increases due to environmental costs, infrastructure costs, social costs, and resource depletion.

Factory farm developers target areas that:

- have environmental laws that are non-existent and/or loosely enforced.
- are isolated (small communities)
- have virtually no economic activity except agriculture
- have large amounts of cheap water

Factory farms tend to be owned by outside investors rather than local people. Therefore any profits earned (or subsidy payments received) do not stay in the community.

Factory farms are taxed at the same rate as other farms, yet they use a much higher proportion of community services than a family farm. For example, the heavy truck traffic required to deliver feed and to transport animals causes road damage and dust problems. The factory farm uses a lot of water, may contaminate the local water sources, yet does not pay extra for the costs of additional water pipes or water treatment facilities. Factory farms require workers who may have children that attend the local school, but their school taxes are no higher than the neighbouring family farm's.

For in-depth discussion of factory farm location decisions, read "*Pollution Shopping in Rural America: The myth of economic development in isolated regions*" by Dr. William J. Weida.

www.factoryfarm.org/docs/Pollution_Shopping_Update.pdf (pdf)

www.factoryfarm.org/docs/Pollution_Shopping_Update.doc (MSWord)



Jobs in Factory Farms

The promise of jobs is one of the most compelling arguments ILO proponents make, particularly in communities where many of the young people have moved away. However the few jobs offered by factory farms come with many problems. Many of these problems stem from factory farms being under less stringent labour regulations which were originally designed for family farms and their hired hands. Factory farms are industrial workplaces, but workers do not have the same level of rights and protections that other factory workers have gained.

Low wages

Intensive livestock production is all about maximizing production and minimizing costs. One of the costs that is minimized is labour—thus ILO workers have low wages. Labour standards that apply to other industries, such as statutory holidays, hours of work, etc. do not necessarily apply in factory farms. Moreover, ILOs are generally not unionized (only one barn in Canada has ever had a union). The combination of low wages and poor working conditions results in a high rate of turn-over. Many companies have had to recruit new workers from abroad, as local and Canadian workers are able to find more attractive employment.

Occupational Health problems

Working in a factory farm is a hazardous occupation.

Hog barn worker disease hazards include:

- infectious diseases
- upper airway disease
- lower airway disease (including organic dust toxic syndrome (ODTS), occupational asthma, acute or subacute bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- interstitial lung disease.

Hog barn worker injury hazards include:

- eye, nose and throat irritation
- traumatic injuries
- noise-induced hearing loss
- needle sticks
- hydrogen sulphide (H₂S) poisonings
- carbon monoxide (CO) poisonings
- electrocutions
- thermal stress
- drowning

Yet in many jurisdictions, coverage by workers compensation is not compulsory for factory farms. So if a worker is hurt on the job or develops a chronic health condition, the cost will be carried by the public health system, the worker and his or her family. It may result in a long-term injury preventing the worker from getting another job.

