

## **Some Pig Debate**

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CEDAR CITY -- Place more than 47,000 pigs together and they are bound to cause a stink -- and raise one.

No one knows this better than officials at Circle Four Farms. The company was praised for creating 400 jobs when it opened its first commercial-size farm in sparsely populated Beaver County six years ago. But residents of nearby Milford began to complain about the stench coming from the lagoons that hold the waste flushed from the huge barns where more than 850,000 pigs a year are fattened before being shipped out of state for slaughter.

No one knows more about the concerns of residents than Brian Mauldwin, a spokesman for Circle Four who has the difficult job of trying to balance the country's growing appetite for pork products with the negative perceptions they hold about large-scale pig farms. Those worries are mainly about possible ground-water contamination and the potential for the air to become permeated with the acrid odor of rotten eggs from sewage lagoons.

Mauldwin's latest challenge is working with the Iron County Planning Commission on a proposal by the company to introduce contract farms in the county. The operations -- also proposed for Beaver and Millard counties -- would provide private farmers the opportunity to raise several thousand piglets a year for the company.

Mauldwin says such contract farms, the first such operations in Utah, would mean the company would no longer have to ship pigs out to Midwest farms to be raised. Farmers in the state also would get a guaranteed income based on the amount of weight the pigs gain during the raising operation.

The first action taken by Iron County on the contract farms came in August, when the County Commission imposed a six-month moratorium on concentrated animal-feed operations in the county while it hammered out an agricultural ordinance that would differentiate between traditional farming operations and industrial ones.

In 11 public hearings on the issue, the comments were weighted against the contract farms. Residents are afraid the county would become peppered with huge hog-growing operations that would diminish the quality of life in the county and drive down property values.

The fears are groundless and based on inaccurate information, according to Mauldwin. He says the contract farms are not meant to be an economic panacea for struggling farmers but an excellent business opportunity for maybe 10 existing farmers if they meet certain requirements. To receive a contract to raise a minimum of 2,100 pigs, a farmer would need to be in the right

location, be able to provide required amounts of water and labor, and be able to finance about \$300,000 for infrastructure with 15 percent down for the barns.

In return, the farmer will receive a profit of about \$7,000 a year for the first 10 years after meeting expenses like mortgages on the barn and insurance. After 10 years, profits could be as much as \$50,000, a year, says Mauldwin.

Circle Four would supply the piglets to raise, along with feed, transportation, medications and technical support.

Under the third and latest draft of the ordinance from the County Commission, such an operation would need to be declared an agricultural zone by the county, which would require an approved odor-abatement program be in place. The contract farm also would have to be located a certain distance from neighbors and have a waste-water discharge permit from the state's Department of Environmental Quality.

Mauldwin calls the ordinance unnecessary because of how Circle Four has structured its contract-farm scenario.

"There is this talk about us putting pigs everywhere," Mauldwin said. "And that's never been the intention. Yet we have it repeated again and again and people still say that's what we want to do."

If the problem is with pigs, then an ordinance should just deal with pigs. But the pigs should not be used for the basis for an ordinance on all other agriculture, Mauldwin says.

"[The ordinance] would tighten the noose around the entire agricultural community," he says.

So far, the only farmer selected by Circle Four who meets their requirements is Randy Peck, the owner of Peck Dairy, five miles north of Parowan in Iron County.

Peck calls the offer from Circle Four, a "great opportunity" for stability in his business, but he worries the new ordinance would impede the operation.

"The problem with agriculture," Peck says, "is that it is hard enough to make it by yourself. If regulations like these are added, you're in deep trouble. You've got to be flexible and can't have more rules."

Peck said he is worried most about provisions in the ordinance that would require him to have an odor-abatement plan and would not allow him to build the barns within eight miles of residential or commercial areas.

Alma Adams, a rancher and president of the Iron County chapter of the Utah Farm Bureau Federation, said current rules are adequate and the county is "getting carried away."

"We don't want another level of red tape. We feel like traditional agriculture -- which has been around for 150 years -- has enough regulation," said Adams. "This would be the most restrictive [ordinance] in the state and maybe the country."

Rich Wilson, chairman of the Iron County Planning Commission, says a lot of the debate is based on bad information.

"Everyone is dealing with fear," said Wilson. "Few people have read this ordinance as it applies to the agricultural community and the centers of population in the county. It has very little, if any, impact on everyday farming. It only impacts industrial-size farming."

Wilson said he understands the farmer's frustrations over more regulation, but said the ordinance only applies a common-sense approach to the process of agricultural zone changes.

Iron County Attorney Scott Burns, whose office helped draft the legislation, said the ordinance is an active approach to protect the county from being overrun with large operations, such as contract farms and dairies, and will not "hinder what ranchers do."

"It's a common-sense approach to what could be an incredible problem," Burns said.

"It doesn't make sense to have an industrial-size pig operation in a residential area. It would make as much sense as placing industrial smoke stacks next to an elementary school. That's just basic zoning laws."

The Iron County Board of Realtors also has dipped into the fray, announcing its support of the ordinance to protect the rights of property owners in the area.

Chris Dahlin, a member of the realtors' group who works as an appraiser, said contract farms would benefit a few farmers at everyone else's expense. "It threatens the wealth of the majority for the wealth of a few," Dahlin says.

Dahlin and other realtors are concerned property values could take a negative hit from contract farms and residents may not be able to enjoy their land.

"The assumption of the Board of Realtors is that if you stink up an area, you're not going to be able to sell houses or build golf courses or do lots of things you want to do," Dahlin said. "Perception is just as important as reality. If we become a center for concentrated feeding operations then we threaten every image we have been trying to create for the last 10 years."

The Planning Commission likely will vote on the ordinance in January and will forward it to the three-member County Commission, which could vote on it in February.

Commissioner Dennis Stowell, a neighbor of Peck's, has publicly opposed the proposed ordinance and Commissioner Louis Bulloch said she supports the legislation because it will bring Iron County into the future of agriculture. The third commissioner, Gene Roundy, is undecided.