



# O.U.E. Update

*A Publication of Organizations United for the Environment*

## First of All, Some Bad News The Scourge of Animal Factories, and “Neurotic Vegetarians.”

As our readers will know, for several years we have regularly filled these pages with stories about the problems caused by animal factories. In 2002, our growing concern about animal factories became a working alliance with a group of citizens who called themselves “Concerned Citizens of Nippenose Valley.” This group organized a powerful resistance to the permitting of two hog factories close to the public school that is part of a community nestled in a beautiful valley. With considerable imagination and hard work, this group prevailed and the township supervisors denied the permit. Since that time, we have worked with four other groups fighting against animal factories, and in one of these battles the citizens also prevented the permitting. The other groups were not successful, finally defeated by the combined power of huge meat and feed companies, a state government strongly advocating animal factories, and township supervisors who either were advocates of animal factories or were too cowed to enforce the dictates of their own ordinances to “protect their citizens.”

Recently, a resident of Turbotville visited one of our meetings asking for advice about how to organize his own neighbors against the construction of a big chicken factory within 500 feet of a neighbor’s home. A month earlier, this neighbor had phoned our editor early in the morning, during a rainstorm, to describe the cascades of water that were rushing down toward his own property from the proposed site of the barns of the chicken factory. To this point, it appears that the opponents of the factory have been unable to recruit enough people to form a working group, but we continue to urge them to do that and have offered them seed money and other help if they do so.

In our view, and in that of a growing body of health and environmental experts, animal factories remain a genuine scourge and need to be resisted on all fronts. The grim details about such factories recently emerged when media all over the world reported the suspicion that the swine flu pandemic had originated at a Smithfield animal factory in Mexico. Maybe it did; maybe it didn’t. But, the other side of that story, and its most important aspect, is all of the other results of Smithfield operations in Mexico. If we succeed in stopping animal factories in our country, they will end up being built in poorer, less regulated ones and will dump their rotten consequences into the lives of more and more disempowered, innocent people. The following article, written by an acclaimed British journalist, makes this point emphatically. ♦

### For La Gloria, the Stench of Blame is from Pig Factories

Stephen Foley in New York, *The Independent*, April 29, 2009

The worried manager of an industrial-sized pig farm in the little Mexican town of Xaltepec invited in journalists in an effort to calm things down. “What happened was an unfortunate coincidence,” he told them, insistently. More than 2,000 miles away, in New York, the world’s richest “pig baron”, Joseph Luter III, is hoping he is right.

Downwind of Xaltepec – where 15,000 squealing hogs are squeezed into 18 warehouses – residents of La Gloria blame Smithfield, Luter’s firm, for an outbreak of respiratory problems that swept the town last month, killing two children. Now with Mexican authorities identifying a four-year-old from the town, Edgar Hernandez, as one of the

first-known cases of swine flu, furious residents believe that they are ground zero of a pandemic threatening the world. The very suggestion has sent a shudder through the ranks of campaigners who have long argued that the sort of industrialized pig farming that has turned Smithfield into one of the most powerful corporations in the US, with a market value of \$1.4 billion, was a disaster waiting to happen.

For Smithfield, the world’s largest pork supplier, which processes more than one in three pigs killed in the US and jointly owns the Xaltepec plant and seven others in the region, the spiraling concern in Mexico threatens to become a worldwide marketing disaster – even before anyone is able to test the hunch of the people of La Gloria.

A team of UN veterinarians is arriving in Mexico to examine whether this new deadly strain of swine flu, mixed as it is with

genetic material from avian and human strains, could be lurking in pig populations undetected. Smithfield says none of its pigs are sick but the company has sent samples for testing.

Victor Ochoa, the Xaltepec manager, ensured employees washing down cars coming into the plant yesterday and made journalists from the Associated Press shower and don protective clothing before entering. In common with his bosses back in the US, Mr. Ochoa insisted that all 15,000 animals had been properly vaccinated, that the plant met all the required health standards, and that the vast swimming pool of feces – industrial pig farming’s toxic by-product – was covered with a lid to limit the exposure to the outside air. “What happened in La Gloria was an unfortunate coincidence with a big and serious problem that is happening now with this new flu virus,” he said. La Gloria residents, though, have been protesting against the farm for months.

Starting in February, one in six of the 3,000 residents reported health problems. The government initially dismissed the spike as a late-season rise in ordinary flu, but by April, health officials sealed off the town and sprayed chemicals to kill the flies that residents said were swarming about their homes.

The business practices of Smithfield are a far cry from its origins, lovingly recounted in sepia-tinted prose on its corporate website. “The Luter family of Smithfield, Virginia, has been curing and selling hams since the turn of the century,” it says.

The reports of swarming flies, terrible smells and pictures of rotting pigs left scattered around the perimeter of its industrialized pig farms in Mexico are echoes of the concerns that have long been troubling environmental activists, campaigning against Smithfield in all the countries in which it operates, not least in the US. Critics say that – even on top of any questions about the humane treatment of the pigs – the sheer quantities of manure that have to be disposed of when thousands, or tens of thousands, of animals are housed together make it impossible to run this business in a safe way.

The manure is collected in a lake underneath the pig pens and then washed into giant pools or lagoons. It is eventually sprayed on nearby fields, but the lagoons have a habit of leaking or flooding. In 1997 Smithfield was fined \$12.6m for violation of the federal Clean Water Act. Its most recent financial reports show it is being sued in Missouri by residents near a facility there who accuse it of being a public nuisance, while a farm in Pennsylvania is under federal investigation over releases into the local water in 2007.

The other risk, scientists say, of concentrating so many pigs together, is the risk of diseases spreading fast, a problem that farmers overcome by pumping the livestock full of vaccines and other drugs. In 2007 an outbreak of swine flu at its farms in Romania cost the company \$13 million.

Tom Garrett, a Wyoming ecologist who campaigned against Smithfield’s expansion into Eastern Europe, where he said it would push small farmers out of business and lead to environmental problems, warned that the company can exploit cor-

rupt local officials and lax regulation in countries outside the US. “They are looking for two things when they set up a farm – water, and naive local people who don’t try to fight them off until they have dug in.”

Smithfield says it is always investing in research to improve farming methods and operates its facilities to the highest standards. Its public relations message is complicated, however, by the uncompromising stance of chairman Joseph Luter III. Animal rights activists “want to impose a vegetarian society” the 67-year-old once said, and vegetarians are “neurotic.”◆

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## Utah Death Trip

*The following story, appearing in the Sunbury Daily Item on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009, is a foreboding sign of our times: a federal judge allows a U.S. corporation to bring toxic poisons from Italy to be stored in the U.S. and — equally bizarre — the local paper buries the story inside its pages without comment. One might expect from the editors of this paper at least the questions, “Why doesn’t Italy want to store this waste at home? And, what is going to happen to the other 18,400 tons of the waste?” Here’s the story:*

A federal judge has ruled that a Utah company can dispose of foreign nuclear waste at its facility in the western Utah desert. Energy Solutions Inc. wants to import up to 20,000 tons of low-level radioactive waste from Italy. After processing in Tennessee, about 1,600 tons would be disposed of in Utah. If approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the waste would be imported through the ports of Charleston, S.C. or New Orleans *Sunbury Daily Item*, May 17, 2009.◆

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## Now, for the Good News: The Zany Plan for the Mall at Montour Crossing

*We have reported in recent issues on the Coalition for Responsible Growth & Resource Conservation, a group that emerged two years ago to resist a truly zany plan by a Philadelphia developer. This bright light of an entrepreneur wanted to dig a forty seven acre pit in order to use the soil to raise the level of the flood plain on a plot where he wants to build a mall. Not only that, he wants to anchor this mall with a giant Lowe’s store that will replace one already existing less than a mile away. Further yet, his project would necessitate the plowing under of a beautiful farm house and barn that are a well-known and widely admired historical site. Below is an update from one of the leaders of CRGRC, Ann Katz. She added a postscript to her update with the word of caution that the battle won’t be over until Fairfield Township sends a letter to the developer with its decision, and this had not happened by the time we went to press (late June). But, it sure looks good from here. Congratulations to CRGRC!*

**A**t noon today (5/21/09) the Fairfield Twp Board of Supervisors (BOS) held a special meeting to consider the developer's request for a one-year extension of time to complete the 14 conditions of the conditional agreement for Montour Crossing. They took two votes:

- (1) They unanimously denied the extension request.
- (2) They unanimously denied the developer's application for the project.

It is my understanding from discussion at the meeting that the developer's current options are:

- (1) Appeal the decision of the BOS through the court system.
- (2) Reapply. ♦

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## **More Good News, this Time from the Buffalo Valley**

*The following update is from the Buffalo Valley Neighbors Association, a group that for the past year has been organized to try to keep a sludge factory from being located in their backyard. We have reported earlier on the details of their resistance and on how much we admire the way they have come together and carried out their work. Although there is the necessary warning that "It's not over until it's over," it looks awfully promising from our view.*

**I**n the winter, 2008 OUE included in its newsletter a story regarding a proposed sewage sludge processing facility. The article identified the applicant's intent to import and process approximately 600 tons of human and municipal sewage sludge daily to a location close to Mifflinburg, PA in Union County. If the PA-DEP approved this application, it would allow the applicant to ship sludge material in from several surrounding states and Canada. Further, this material would be transported along already busy streets and major highways in Union County.

The project is still very much alive. However, public and administrative concerns have been elevated, and so far the project is stalled awaiting an appeal to the local Zoning Hearing Board.

The application for permit to the PA-DEP was determined to be "administratively incomplete" in the fall of 2008. A 90 day extension was granted in November to allow the applicant to correct deficiencies in the application. The extension expired in February of 2009, and in late February it was announced that the application to the PA-DEP was denied.

On the local front, a new application to build the facility on Furnace Road in Mifflinburg was submitted and introduced at the January 12, 2009 Planning Commission meeting. On April 27, 2009 the Buffalo Township Planning Commission replied with a roll call vote unanimously denying the application.

This is good news to residents of Buffalo Township. But there is no illusion that this story is coming to a end any time soon. The facts are that Zoning Hearing has already scheduled a meeting for July 14 to hear the applicant's challenge to the Zoning Officers' determination that this project does not comply with existing land use guidelines. On another front, legal briefs are being prepared for an anticipated court hearing where the applicant will challenge the Buffalo Township Planning Commission decision to deny the application.

The heart of the matter centers on the fact that a year ago the Zoning officer and the Planning Commission conditionally approved this proposal. This happened while the community slept and the many facts of this sewage sludge processing facility were concealed. Time and time again, the small communities in Pennsylvania see projects creep into their towns and country side because the true details are unseen and the decisions are left to a small number of good citizens who are either volunteering their time freely or receiving only token wages for grinding through complex and poorly written land use issues during long evening meetings. The residents of Buffalo Township are grateful to these citizens and officials who have recognized that sewage sludge processing on this scale is not an agricultural activity and is a danger to the community.

Today, many residents are attending Township Supervisor meetings, Planning Commission meetings and other public hearings in an effort to stay informed on critical issues.

The Buffalo Valley Neighbors Association intends to continue informing the public of issues facing public safety, health and the quality of life in central Pennsylvania.

To learn more on activities in our area, visit the BVNA website; ([www.bvneighbors.org](http://www.bvneighbors.org)). Or write to: BVNA, Inc., P.O. Box 299, Mifflinburg, PA, 17844. ♦

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## **Last of All: Is Pineknotted Park a Safe Place for Kids to Play?**

**O**ff and on since 2002, the OUE Board has been working with members of a group in Northumberland -- now called Norry Neighbors -- to resist the expansion of tank farms and the construction of an ethanol tank farm along Rt. 11, in Pt. Township between Northumberland and Danville. More recently, we have joined the group in its efforts to try to determine if the area's principal public recreation area, Pineknotted Park, built on top of an old landfill, is a safe for kids to play there. Our focus here will be on the Park issue.

How safe is Pineknotted Park? It depends on whom you ask. In 1998, a Northumberland Borough solicitor, in response to high levels of toxic chemicals detected by the Borough engineer in and around Pineknotted Park, said the toxins "could just be a tip of the iceberg of what is under-

ground.” He also said that, “Medical testing is a matter that should be brought to the attention of the families that have entered the site of the former landfill.” At that time, we wrote a story on the matter, and we pointed out that “a housewife and mother noticed a messy liquid oozing up through the ground in Pineknott Park.” We also wrote that “a reporter for the local paper found DEP reports of leachate at the site of site on six occasions from 1984-1996.”

Also, in 1998, an engineer for Brinjac, the company that tested the safety of the park stated, “Let me tell you what, I am not putting my kids on that landfill. You’ve got leachate coming out of there that has lead, etc. Look at the [DEP report that’s been provided you. These contain contaminate levels] fifteen times the safe drinking water standards.”

This kind of information did not deter Northumberland Borough from keeping the park open, but with continuing evidence of toxics at the site, citizens complaints led EPA to do its own testing in 2008. After tiring of waiting for the EPA to publish its full report, in February members of Norry Neighbors, OUE and the Sierra Club traveled to Bellefonte to meet with field aides of Senator Robert Casey and Representative Carney. This group of petitioners asked for help from the politicians to pressure EPA to publish its full report. At this meeting, the visitors also presented the aides a letter to Norry Neighbors from a widely experienced expert at the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (a group in Virginia founded by long time activist, Lois Gibbs). The CHEJ expert was uncompromising in this assessment. He called for more testing and stated that, “Given the history of this site and the contamination found in the recent round of testing, the use of the site for recreational purposes needs to be seriously reconsidered.”

In February, 2009, Karl Markiewicz, a senior toxicologist at the national Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, issued an opinion on the EPA findings at Pineknott Park. After listing a dozen toxic chemicals above acceptable levels found in the soils close to and draining into the river, Markiewicz wrote that, “we do not expect” them to harm anyone. Regarding several toxic metals found in the river water, he claimed they posed no danger but admitted that the tests used “were not...sufficient to fully evaluate all

exposures to surface waters throughout the broad expanses of the Susquehanna River.” Do you trust EPA “expectations” or their insufficient testing methods enough to allow your kid to swim in the river anywhere near Pineknott Park?

Despite the warning from the CHEJ and the comments, however dubious, by Markiewicz in March, 2009, the EPA widely distributed an information pamphlet concluding most importantly that “...there is no threat to the health and safety of people who may use the park.”

So, what should you believe about the safety of Pineknott Park? Our own experience, after thirty years of environmental grassroots work, tells us not to accept at first glance *any* proclamation by the EPA or the PA DEP about the hazards of an alleged polluted site. We know, of course, that honest government officials do exist, and we have worked with them before. However, as an example of whose side the government is almost always on, read the first article in this newsletter about a disastrous policy on animal factories for over a decade the love child of the EPA and the DEP.

There can’t be any doubt that new testing needs to be done on this park by some independent testing firm or agency, agreed to by all the stakeholders. These stakeholders would certainly include Norry Neighbors, along with all the others downstream who use the river as a source of water, for fishing, swimming, boating, and other kinds of recreation.

Norry Neighbors welcomes the public to join its efforts to work for a clean environment by becoming members of their group or offering support. Write to Norry Neighbors, P.O. Box 229, Northumberland, PA. 17857. ♦

### **OUE MEETING PLACE CHANGED**

After almost twenty years of gathering at the Watontown United Methodist Church, the OUE Board now has a new place. This spring we began to meet at the second floor meeting room of the Mondragón Bookstore in Lewisburg, at 111 Market Street. The public is welcome to attend, especially those who need help in dealing with a polluting neighbor. We very much appreciate the generosity of the church in opening its doors to us for so long. And, we wish them well with the construction of their new church building.

**OUE Publications Committee:** Editor, Charles Sackrey; Associate Editors, Linda Godfrey, Sally Lauver, Thom Lauver and Clyde Peeling; Distribution, Bessie Bush and Linda Godfrey.

## **Organizations United for the Environment**

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**OUE is a grass-roots organization dedicated to protecting the environment. As a non-profit, charitable organization, OUE is crucially dependent on our readers' donations to continue its work, and you can help us along with a tax-deductible contribution. Donations are used to fund efforts such as the *Ban the Burner* campaign in the early 1990s, activities of *The Task Force on Hog Factories*, alternative energy projects that will be built at local schools, and for public education. Our web site is: [www.ouenews.org](http://www.ouenews.org). Please send your comments to: [editor@ouenews.org](mailto:editor@ouenews.org).**