

CAFOs, Conflict, and Compromise: An Ethnographic Approach to Attitudes Towards Livestock
Production and Related Conflict in Iowa

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Introduction

Concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are agricultural operations where animals are kept and raised in confined situations where they are, or will be, “stabled or confined and fed or maintained for a total of 45 days or more in any 12-month period,” and which do not contain crops or vegetation over any portion of the facility (US EPA; Animal Feeding Operations). While the farmers take care of the livestock, large corporations control production at these operations (Wing 2002). Concentrated feeding operations are a key component of the U.S agricultural system, dominant in what is often referred to as America’s “industrial agriculture”. It is of increasing interest to local communities and environmental activists to understand how citizens are being affected by this farming technique and the conflict it creates between communities and farmers.

In the last few decades there has been a shift in American agriculture towards industrial large-scale farming, resulting in the presence of 257,000 CAFOs nationwide. CAFOs offer “a more efficient system to feed and house animals through specialization, increased facility size and close confinement of animals” (National Conference of State Legislatures 2016). There are 3,055 CAFOs in Iowa as defined by the Clean Water Act (US EPA; Are There CAFOs in Region 7? 2014). The health and economic effects of CAFOs on surrounding communities have been well documented. CAFOs have “large adverse impacts” on the property value of houses within three miles of a livestock production lot, with a decreasing adverse effect on property values beyond three miles (Isakson and Ecker 2008). CAFOs also have adverse health effects on both humans and the environment by contaminating water sources with waste products and excess nutrients, and can directly impact both CAFO farmers and nearby community members by exposing them to pathogens, dust, and odors (US EPA; How do CAFOs Impact the Environment? 2014). The exposure to these pathogens is linked to complaints of annoyance,

worry, aversion, stress, tension, fatigue, anger, depression, nausea, vomiting, and headache (Schiffman et al. 1995; Schusterman 2001, cited in Wing et al. 2008).

In many instances the adverse effects of CAFOs lead to conflict. This conflict may mean tension in the interpersonal relationships among neighbors (Nicole 2013), but frequently takes the form of lawsuits filed against the farmers who own the land and operation, but who do not fully control production. In 2002 a survey was given to local residents in Charlotte, Vermont, in response to the proposed construction of a new dairy facility and manure storage lagoon that would house 684 dairy cows. The survey revealed that 44.3% of residents surveyed were resolutely against the expansion of this operation, and a follow-up open-ended questionnaire exposed strong views toward the farmer personally as well as concentrated animal feeding operations in general (Smith et al. 2008). This bias towards farmers could be due to the local context of the issue, a rejection of any level of participation in ‘factory’ farming, lack of knowledge about the role of large corporation in CAFOs, or the absence of any effective pathway for responding to conflicts over farming practices. The people and neighbors impacted by CAFOs have access to lawmakers and to the courts through the democratic process, but the legislative process in many states has been unresponsive to the concerns of citizens against CAFOs. This has led to many communities taking action on their own through litigation or local ordinances in lieu of governmental channels (Donham et al. 2007). In this project I asked participants about where they see conflict [originating](#) and what a solution would look like for these communities, in an effort to illuminate how people understand these conflicts and how [the source of conflict](#) impacts peace making efforts.

There is a large body of scholarship that examines the effect of CAFOs on farmers *or* the effect of CAFOs on surrounding communities, but little research that examines the nuance and diversity of opinions and experiences held on both sides of this issue. Through this research I sought to further understand the effects of CAFOs on communities and their experiences with conflict over farming practices using qualitative data gathering techniques. In response to the lack of multiplicity of perspectives in literature the purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs and experiences of the residents of Poweshiek and neighboring counties pertaining to CAFOs, to determine how people feel about them and what they perceive to be the source of conflict. Participants were also asked what their ideal relationship is with livestock production in hopes of understanding how communities that are affected by livestock production imagine compromising

or co-existing with CAFOs. This research was done in the hope that in condensing a multiplicity of experiences and perspectives in one document it will be possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of agriculture in Iowa.

Materials and Methods

Qualitative data collection methods were used to understand Iowan's perspectives on livestock production. I developed a series of open-ended interview questions with the aim of learning as much about the experiences of people involved in livestock production, whether through ownership, operation, or proximity. Eight specific questions were given to each participant with follow-up and/or clarifying questions then asked as needed. Interviews lasted about an hour, and were conducted at a location of the participant's choosing. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participant, and transcribed in the exact words of the interview to keep phrases intact. The Grinnell College Institutional Review Board ruled this study to be exempt.

Participants were recruited through word of mouth and recruitment posters placed at the Poweshiek County Fair. Ten individuals agreed to participate in the study, though five interviews will serve as the main source of data. Only two of the participants recruited practiced conventional agriculture. It was difficult to recruit more pork producers possibly because of suspicions of the motivation of our research and the relationship between the institution and local producers.

In reporting the interview data the names of the participants have been changed to protect their identity.

Results

Ten people agreed to participate in our study, though the experiences of five participants will be used to represent the four categories of perspectives given in this study: the non-confinement farmer, a community member who does not have an agricultural livelihood, a conventional farmer, and a professional who works in confinement compliance. Each participant shared a unique perspective on livestock production in Iowa, and their answers to five key questions of the eight-question interview will be used to understand the ways in which different community members are affected by livestock production and the conflict that is associated with

it. Their answers to these questions will also be used to illuminate the ways in which communities agree on how livestock production should function in Iowa agriculture.

The non-confinement farmer perspective was supplied by RD, an organic farmer that owns a 400-acre family farm, 15 acres of which they use to produce sustainably. They are surrounded by conventional agriculture, including a close-by hog confinement. The non-conventional farmer perspective will also be provided by EH, who manages 365 acres of restored native tall grass prairie and has had experience managing and producing pastured livestock. The property that EH manages is surrounded by conventional agriculture, including 3 CAFOs within a mile of her property.

DC provides the perspective of the community member who does not have an agricultural livelihood. DC is a professor at Grinnell College and a member of a local agricultural justice group that is against confinement operations and that advocates for, “the exclusion and abolition of these unhygienic nuisances” (CARES). DC has advised a thesis project on the study of this anti-CAFO organization but has never worked in agriculture or livestock production.

The conventional farmer perspective is provided by WG, a retired farmer who owns and operated a heritage farm. When he farmed the land he had dairy cows, some hogs, and three goats. He now rents the land to another producer who uses the land for corn and soybeans. WG lives in a rural agricultural area and is surrounded by conventional agriculture operations. WG and his wife considered signing a production contract and building a confinement building on their property, but ultimately decided that they did not want to incur the ire of their anti-CAFO neighbors and suffer through a nuisance lawsuit.

RR is a professional who works in CAFO compliance. She and her family live in a rural agricultural area, where her husband operates a small hog confinement. Down the road from her house her parents and in-laws both own and operate hog confinements. RR owns a small business that helps producers write manure management plans and keeps these operations up-to-date with legislation and DNR requirements. She has been involved in conventional agriculture her entire life.

The Role of Livestock Production in Everyday Life

Participants were asked: What is the role of livestock production in your life? Their answers illuminate the ways that agriculture exists in the lives of people with any level of connection to livestock production, and reveal the different forms that livestock production take in agriculture.

The Non-conventional Agriculture Perspective

RD owns and operates a 400-acre family farm. He has raised chickens on and off since moving to the property, and twelve of their 15 acres in production are used to grow alfalfa. A neighbor who owns a cow-calf operation cuts and bales the alfalfa for his cattle. This arrangement with his neighbors represents to RD not only how livestock production exists in his day-to-day life, but how agriculture should look: “So we live closely with livestock and we have several pasture livestock operations on our road so it's, you know, I really am happy when I see people put their ground back into pasture and see cows on the land ‘cause that's how agriculture is supposed to be done in my mind.” RD cites being surrounded by pastured livestock as one of the things that makes him happy about where he lives.

EH also has a relationship to pasture raised livestock. EH managed livestock professionally for five years before becoming the caretaker of the restored perennial prairie land she currently manages, but she also acknowledges the role of livestock production in her life as a consumer.

I was a vegan for like 12 years, and I started eating meat about 8 years ago, and pretty much I only buy meat from people I know who grow it. So I'm really hyper sensitive about the meat that I eat and I like to be able to look at the producer in the eyes. Better yet, see the farm; know the farmer where the animals are produced. That's why I have a big freezer.

EH managed 1,600 acres of rotational grazing pasture, and worked mostly with cattle, but also bison, sheep, and goats. She has intimate experience with grass-based systems, strengthened further through her five years of work for the Iowa State Extension Grass-based Livestock Working Group where she worked with livestock producers around the state to promote policies and programs that support grass-based systems.

But livestock production takes another, less appreciated form in EH's life. Within a mile from her property are three hog confinements, totaling around 15,000 hogs. She sees the effect of the proximity of these confinement operations all around her.

The, there are effects on the soil, water, and air in my home, and outside of my home. There are impacts on the land that I manage in the form of water quality issues, algae blooms in my pond. Spray drift off of the Corn and soybean production, the domestic livestock, you know. And it just smells like poop all the time. Where I work!

RD also has also experienced some of the negative effects of living near a confinement operation. A hog confinement was recently put up by RD's house in what he called a "stealth operation", meaning that he and his wife had no idea it was being built until it had already gotten approval and they were breaking ground on the construction. The day-to-day operations haven't had a significant effect on RD, but he remembers one night being almost knocked over by the smell when walking his dogs. He remembers, "...it was absolutely inescapable and the stench was just, you know, would take your breath away." Because the confinement is northeast of his property and Iowa summer winds blow southwest RD and his wife have not experienced very many side effects of living near this confinement. But, as RD says, "that's lucky. For us, not for the people to the south."

The Community Member who is Not Involved in Agriculture Perspective

DC knows that livestock production does not have much of a role in his life besides that of a consumer. He does not eat much red meat, and the meat that he does is eighty percent buffalo meat ordered from a producer in South Dakota. The rest of his meat consumption is sourced from local chickens and lamb. He and his family used to own some land that was used to pasture cattle, but is now used by a Conservation Reserve Program. The move away from eating red meats was prompted by health concerns, but also ecological concerns. DC has pretty simple feelings about livestock production, saying, "Wouldn't want to be involved in it, but I understand that if we're going to eat meat we've got to figure out ways to sustainably produce it". This seems to sum up not only DC's relationship to livestock production, but also generally how many consumers who are not in the business of livestock production feel about the process.

The Conventional Farmer Perspective

WG has spent his whole life in livestock production. When he was operating the heritage farm that he and his wife own he was producing dairy, and raising some hogs along with three goats. As a kid he grew up raising chickens. WG personally quit farming in 1972 to work with his father-in-law as a drainage contractor, and rented his land out to a neighboring producer who grows corn and soybeans. When WG and his wife were still operating the land a company approached them with an offer to buy some of their land to construct a confinement building. They turned down the company to appease their neighbors: “we probably wouldn't have done it only because we wouldn't want to upset Neighbors. That's the only reason we wouldn't do it.” There was a very public nuisance lawsuit happening near them at the time, and a conversation with a very “uptight” neighbor warned them off of the hassle of putting up a unit. WG laughed as he recounted this story, remembering that, “our neighbor to the east gets a little hot under the collar periodically. We've lived within a mile of each other our whole lives but that doesn't matter.” It seems the specter of angry neighbors and the prospect of a long and ugly lawsuit was enough to turn down the profits of signing a production contract.

The Confinement Compliance Professional Perspective

RR has two different relationships to livestock production: she owns and operates a small business that helps producers write manure management plans that comply with the DNR, and her husband is a farmer who operates a small hog confinement building. So for RR, “it's a daily activity for us, it's a source of our income; it has been my whole life.” Growing up her father raised hogs farrow to finish so she grew up castrating pigs, moving pigs, vaccinating pigs, and helping her dad round up the sows when they forgot to close the gate on their way to church. Her father was one of the last Iowa farmers to raise pigs farrow to finish, and as such she has been privy to each incremental movement of Iowa hog raising towards confinement. Her husband, and her husband's parents, both operate small hog confinements.

My husband loves it; he's good at taking care of the animals. He is the type of person who takes the time to make sure everything's going well with them, that they're doing okay, and he doesn't like other people to do it for him because he likes to be the manager of it, he likes to do a really good job of that. Um, so, he chores, morning and night, and takes any of the time he needs to in there.

RR graduated from Iowa State with a general agricultural degree. The compliance aspect of her involvement in livestock production began when the DNR started doing the phosphorus index manure management plan.

It's a fairly complicated process, and the manure management plans changed too much, it's a complicated system. And my husband, his plan switched, he had a bigger building at the time so he needed to switch to this new system. I graduated from Iowa State with a general agricultural degree. I had worked for the farm Service Agency but then quit to stay home with the birth of my daughter. And so I started with my husband's manure management plan.

So RR was trained by the local Extension office, and started a business. It's important to her that she's helping producer's have the opportunities they need to maintain compliance. While livestock production has always had a very personal role in her life and the lives of her family, it also has taken on a professional role in her life. All aspects of her family's income and livelihoods rely on conventional livestock production.

How They Feel About Where They Live

Participants were asked: how do you feel about where you live? Follow up questions asked to clarify or unpack a certain topic ranged from; what are some good things about where you live? What are some not-so-good things about where you live? Has your opinion changed since you first moved there? How? How people responded to these questions revealed that people perceive living in rural areas in different ways, and that livestock production can affect people's perception of where they live in both negative and positive ways. It also revealed that the way people feel about where they live is heavily tied to the land itself.

The Non-conventional Agriculture Perspective

RD lives in the North English River Valley, an area that has traditionally supported pastured livestock production, but which has made a transition into row crop over the last several years. He has lived there with his wife for the last 20 years and has grown fond of living in a rural area, proud to contribute 15 acres of sustainable agriculture to the area. RD's first response when asked about where he lives is "it's beautiful". When pressed about the not-so-good part about living there RD described the changes in agriculture that he's seen happen to the land.

They are now completely surrounded by conventional agriculture, which leads to them being drifted on a regular basis with pre-emergent herbicide in the spring and foliar fungicide in the summer. A hog confinement went in by their property last fall. Over the time that RD and his wife have lived there the surrounding land has been bought up by a lot of large investment outfits, “mostly one family that has several sub-corporations underneath their single overarching umbrella corporation.” As they have lived there more and more family farms have moved away.

Yeah, less and less people actually living where they farm, and so it used to be that the neighbors would get out in the fall and they'd get on the combine and they'd combine for several days and then harvest would be over. Now, um, six 30-row combines come in and they run day and night, you know, headlights at night climbing over the hillsides and when you get up in the morning everything is just scraped clean, you know, it's completely mechanized. So it has changed quite a bit in the 19 years that we've lived there.

RD's initial thoughts about where he lives are tied to the landscape: it's beauty, the rich history of pastured lands, and the type of soil that the area is characterized by. But when asked about what makes living there not ideal his mind immediately turns to the industrialization of agriculture that he has been privy to. To RD, “industrial agriculture is what stands between us and our perfect living situation in a lot of ways.”

EH is also immediately drawn to the land of her property: “I have the best backyard in Jasper County. That's what I tell people”. As the manager of a large area of perennial restored Iowa tall grass prairie EH is tied to the land, both professionally and emotionally. She describes the beauty of this landscape as far more than its aesthetic value.

I live in the middle of an amazingly gorgeous piece of land that I care about in a lot of different ways. From its aesthetic beauty to the biodiversity of the landscape. But also just the fact that it's one big perennial landscape. I tell people that my view only includes two acres of corn, or soybeans, and that's really amazing. You can't really, there's, it's very hard to find a place to live in Iowa where the majority of the landscape is under perennial cover. For me I am very, very thankful that I get to have a perennial landscape around me, and I don't have to look at corn and soybeans, because it's really depressing.

There is a love of the land that is easy to read in EH's response to this question. Her duty to the land as its caretaker blends into her enjoyment of living in a rural setting.

I love going walking in my backyard, and I love observing wildlife in my backyard: following the phenology of migration, and blooming, and babies, and everything is a great joy for me. And so I'm really grateful to get to live here. And I'm thankful for the impact my surroundings have on me.

As for the negative parts of living there, "I can't swim in my pond, and it smells like s***". Neighborhood teenagers tear through the property on four wheelers, and the area is on the flight path of the Iowa Air National Guard, so the Chinook military helicopters fly directly over two or three times a week. EH has seven neighbors who own land adjacent to hers. Two of the houses on the south side of the property are two of the biggest conventional farmers in the area, while the neighbors right across the street from the property are EH's good friends. This area of Jasper County is very sparsely populated, though three CAFOs are within a mile of the property.

The Community Member who is Not Involved in Agriculture Perspective

DC does not live in an agricultural area, though he was raised in the "short grass prairies of South Dakota" which influences his concerns about the ecological impacts of agriculture. He currently lives in an older, quieter neighborhood in the town of Grinnell. He enjoys that it is a quieter neighborhood, and feels that he has a good relationship with his neighbors.

The Conventional Farmer Perspective

WG lives outside of the town of Grinnell with a few neighbors surrounding his property. He had a succinct answer when asked what he liked about living there, "Been there all my life, and it's out in the country". The negative aspects of his time living there are the challenges faced by agricultural areas after large snowfalls. He remembers being snowed in on his property for five days, and having to cut through his fields to eventually leave. As he and his wife have lived there they've noticed less and less kids, along with families moving away. Even their church has moved closer to the town of Grinnell. They assert that people don't want to pay for land anymore, just wanting to buy farmhouses and live in the romantic countryside. But they notice that these people do not always stay: "the neighbors to the east of us, the place has been sold 3 times within the last 10 years. And the couple divorced. And the next couple, they were

remodeling and they divorced.” As they have lived on their property they have noticed their neighborhood not only grow older, but change.

I said the biggest problem is with the change of people in our community. This is what happened 40 years ago, they're probably wouldn't have been as many complaints because everybody was Hometown people. Now we have got so many that have moved in little acreages or just purchased a house. They come from town... they want to live in the country but they don't want the country smells.

WG and his wife live on a heritage farm, the property having been in the family for more than 156 years. They intend for the land to go to their grandchildren after them, though they expect them to hire a farm management company to actually produce on the land.

And I told the grandchildren you're going to inherit this someday. And I said don't sell it, because it's a nice source of income. And my grandson, he was talking to somebody else about it, and he said 'we're not going to sell it because it's a great source of income!'

WG and his wife have lived with some of their neighbors and known them personally for more than 70 years. It's clear that not only is their farm a heritage farm by definition, but their history with their land and the area in which they live is important to them, a heritage in itself.

The Confinement Compliance Professional Perspective

RR lives in a rural farming community, in the same area she grew up in. In high school she remembers wanting to move to a big city, but during college realized that she loved living in a farm community. Eight years ago she moved her family back to be closer to the land she grew up on, and her parents and in-laws. She cites her neighbors as one of the reasons why she loves where she lives.

My community, the neighbors are amazing. It's the same people I grew up with, the kind of people who see your lawn mower doesn't work and call you up and say oh I see your yards long and we know that doesn't normally happen, can we loan you our lawn mower? Can we come down and mow it for you? Or I just need this one piece of equipment, just as one time and I borrow it from The Neighbors. And it's a kind of community where if you try to to drive around the corner on the gravel by my house, but you can't because there's trucks parked because they're having a farmer meeting, like solving the neighborhood problems.

There are drawbacks to living in such a rural community. RR laughed as she explained that to pick her kids up from their friend's houses she has to drive over 20 minutes. Sometimes she has trouble with her Internet connection and other technological issues typical of living a few miles from the nearest town. But after airing those few issues, RR went back to listing all of the reasons she loves where she lives, all heavily tied to the role of agriculture.

I love the freedom that being in the country allows us. I have this business where I work with hog producers, my husband's a farmer, my dad's a farmer, my father-in-law's a farmer. And my husband is super, super, super handy. He's remodeled tons of houses. I love the country because there's not the regulations there, and we can learn and grow and change things for our family without the regulations that they have in town. I love the yard. Except my children love to ride four wheeler and they are making a trail in my yard *laughs* but it's a good problem! It's a great place to raise kids. My son is super active, he's outside all the time, they spend all their time outdoors.

It's clear that RR loves living in a rural Christian farming community, and that she cherishes the benefits she and her family receive from the land. Much like WG, her love of the land is tied in with her family's history and heritage, and a lifetime spent loving the land she lives on.

The Role of Conflict

Participants were asked if they perceived there being any conflict surrounding livestock production, and then what their personal experiences with said conflicts or disputes were. Across all ten participants every single person answered that yes, they did perceive there being conflict about livestock production in Iowa. Within the five case studies each person has had a unique experience with disputes over livestock production, and their perception of the presence of conflict in discussions of agriculture are shaped by their experiences with not only conflict, but also processes of livestock production itself.

The Non-conventional Agriculture Perspective

RD acknowledges the existence of conflict generally in Iowa, but also has experienced a fair amount of conflict and disagreement over livestock production in his own personal life. He used in own experiences with conflict as an example of how he sees these disagreements existing

generally. Five years ago a company tried to put a large hog CAFO to the south of RD's property, and he remembers that it really came down to the family that signed the production contract on one side of the road with their friends, and the neighbors from around the area on the other side holding counter protests. He describes:

...The family and their friends, you know, yelling and cursing at the people who were protesting against their operation. And these were people who, you know; some probably went to high school together. And there was a lot of bad blood, and you know, there were people, for example, there was a guy who worked at Victor Manufacturing I think, and he had just built a house, the first house that he ever owned, and he and his family basically put everything they had into it, and he was hot, you know, I mean he was looking at basically loss of value of everything he'd ever worked for and the people who were raising the livestock think "hey it's my ground, I can do whatever I want. It's farm country, you don't like the smell of pigs you should live somewhere else." You know, it's as simple as that.

Through their counter protest the neighbors managed to halt the construction of the confinement, though the confinement just relocated. The company that had contracted with the grower decided that it just did not want the hassle of the neighbors organizing and discontent. But RD acknowledged that this protest worked in part because the community knew that it was going to be constructed ahead of time. The hog confinement that was put up by his property in the last year was a "stealth operation", meaning that they did not know it was coming until it was too late to protest.

EH has also experienced conflict with local producers building confinements near her property. On one end of the spectrum she has experienced conflict with neighbors over teenager behavior, a series of arrests completed after multiple occurrences of destruction caused by teenagers trespassing on dirt bikes. On the other end of the spectrum they have lawyered up and fought plans to put in another CAFO near her property. In her experience "CAFOs have service at divisive point between some of our neighbors, and as a coming together point with other neighbors." The CAFO they fought has not been installed yet, but EH isn't hopeful that this will last. The producer who tried to install the CAFO already operates one that is three tenths of a mile from EH's property, and to her knowledge they applied for another one to the southwest of her property.

...Like right up in our other neighbor's backyard basically. And right now they are to the north, to the East, and to the South East. And the Southwest, with prevailing winds from the southwest during the summer that would really have a major impact on it. And enough is enough; I think 15,000 hogs in 1 square mile more than enough for me.

A neighbor of EH's rents land out to these producers, and she hypothesizes that this neighbor threatened to not rent them farmland if they went through with the new installation. The producers say that they will try to put in another place, and have been quiet for a while, but EH believes that another application is coming soon. But much like the "stealth operation" experienced by RD, EH knows that they could still build a CAFO within a mile of property line and she might not know until they break ground on construction. It's only through dogged attention paid to the possibility of this new CAFO that EH would ever know of its presence.

I won't find out about it until, I mean I have a Google news alert, you know for like CAFO, and County, and CAFO and Kellogg, and CAFO and Jasper. Everything. And that's really the only way to find out, is news alerts, they really put out press releases for supervisor meetings, and if they do they're not always, it's just a PDF so they don't scan the words so you can't search for different words. So really I just, I call, like every 2 months I call the Jasper County Environmental coordinator and ask him if there's any new applications. He did call me too when there was an application a couple months ago, for a couple miles away, like 4 miles away from here. He called me and let me know that somebody had applied.

But by no means does the environmental coordinator need to inform EH of any new applications for CAFOs: "And he's got a pretty political position in that way, so it's only through kind of befriending him and getting his trust I think that... most County Environmental Specialists, or whatever, they're not going to do that at all basically." The threat of legal action may deter some producers from installing a confinement building, but in no way do they need to inform you of its imminent existence, inches from your fence line or not.

The Community Member who is Not Involved in Agriculture Perspective

DC perceives general conflict as being the clash of two "polar opposites". CAFO vs. anti-CAFO, intensive livestock production vs. free range. His personal experiences with conflict have been through his work with Poweshiek CARES, a community organization that organizes against

CAFOs and industrial agriculture. He has supported this organization financially, helped students of his gather information and data that would help the cause, marched in parades, and handed out brochures. He laughingly assures us that he has never thrown or received a punch in the name of methods of livestock production, but has been active in the grassroots community organizing against CAFOs and unsustainable industrial agriculture.

The Conventional Farmer Perspective

Conflict over livestock production is the exact reason why WG and his wife never signed a production contract for their property. They had observed a long and messy nuisance lawsuit filed against a local producer and decided that the prospect of their own lawsuit was not worth it. WG was also approached by some of his neighbors and asked to sign a petition that was opposing a local confinement, but he wouldn't do it: "Well, Farmer's nowadays aren't going to raise, or monkey around with hogs. And you've got to raise them someplace. And it's a lot cleaner for the environment if you got the confinement, you spread the manure and sometimes it's odorous." Other than choosing not to sign the petition, WG has not experienced very much conflict. He understands that some of his neighbors oppose CAFOs, but doesn't see why they should have a problem with them. His wife also questions the rejection of CAFOs, singling out the issue of odor as the most common complaint associated with confinements.

Most people have air conditioners and don't have their windows open because the gravel roads are dusty. And so, there again, you don't get the smell. Which is their complaint. Plus, they figure it's unhealthy. Well do they want pork? Do they want bacon?

WG and his wife also do not see why people would complain about the supposed mistreatment of the animals. As his wife says, "Well I've never heard an animal complain. Or say thank you, you know. I don't think they have a feeling! So only God gave humans feelings and a brain to think with." In confinements the tail of the pig is cut off so that the other pigs don't bite and pull at each other's tails. There are a few confinement buildings near their property, but they have never had a problem with those buildings or the people that operate them.

The Confinement Compliance Professional Perspective

As someone who works professionally with industrial hog producers, RR has seen the way a lot of these conflicts play out. A few of the producers that she works with are tied up in

small nuisance lawsuit. She sees fundamentally an issue of communication. She doesn't see these disagreements over livestock production as a new phenomenon, rather that they are now being moved to the forefront of people's attention towards agriculture.

Like with my farmers: legally we can make it work, because you can do that. But I'm not going to do the paperwork for that because you need to speak to your neighbor. So I deal with the larger buildings, and make sure they follow all the regulations. And even with that I always say have you talk to your neighbors? Have you, do they know what is going on? So I think that the disputes that I've seen have really had to do more with communication. And I don't think that's a new thing, it's just on a larger scale. And there's more Outlets to be heard on either side. Yeah. And I think it can be anything, not necessarily just confinements. You know if your neighbor decided to put a trash compactor right next to your place, it's the same thing. You have your own space, and you have the Liberty to do whatever you want your space, however you have to be considerate.

RR doesn't have any involvement in the lawsuits of her producers, because all of the manure management laws have been followed. In the instances where she attends supervisor meetings on the behalf of her producers, she is there to answer questions about manure management plans. In her opinion, though they are nuisance lawsuits, the litigation is not about smell, it's about family history and bad blood between neighbors. In her own experience she has found that communicating with neighbors has circumvented any chance of disagreements over her husband's livestock production practices. If they are going to haul manure that day, which requires that a part of the road be shut down, she and her husband make sure to check that their neighbors aren't expecting to need the road that day, and arrange for their neighbors to use their backyard to get to the main road instead. They compromise.

In her experience her producers, though not all of them take care of the day-to-day operations of their confinements and may not necessarily be farmers, live on the ground by their confinements, have their life on the ground they own and produce on. The conflict that she has experienced, or observed producers experiencing, is never due to lack of compliance.

The Origin of Conflict

Every participant when asked if there was conflict about livestock production answered the same way: yes, of course there is. But when asked where they thought the locus of this conflict was, they all gave answers that ranged from marginally dissimilar to completely different. If the existence of conflict over livestock production is a foregone conclusion, then we must understand where people think this conflict is coming from to solve it. In an effort to understand how people understood the conflict they all were sure existed participants were asked: if you have experienced conflict over livestock production, what do you think the origin of this conflict is?

The Non-conventional Agriculture Perspective

RD describes the origin of conflict as “some sort of twisted notion of property rights” that is propagated by the production corporations and relies on the ‘lone cowboy’ mentality held by a lot of pork producers. He describes this attitude as “I’ll do what I want on my ground”, and in combination with the corporate agriculture interests that push a narrative that farmers have no economic choice, producers are trapped. RD sees industrial producers as having a dimension of defensiveness drawn from “self-loathing”.

I think that there's a dimension of defensiveness, or even of self-loathing that these guys deal with because it's like “Dammit I'm forced to grow corn and beans, and now the corn price is so low I have to raise hogs and I can't farrow pigs for, and my kids can't farrow pigs for me because that's not how it's done anymore, now you can't put them out on the land and make any money, and I can't even own them, all I can do is put up a big building and feed them for somebody else”. And so they feel helpless, and angry, and resentful, and so when you confront one of these individuals generally you're gonna get somebody who's in a really defensive and fearful mode...and they get really, really vicious. And that's where conflict happens, you know, that's when bad stuff happens.

When conflict breaks out, RD sees an inevitable presence of machismo that escalates the disagreement. Both sides are being so macho, but “it's like being criticized by your neighbor who you deer hunt with for 20 years it's like ‘Hey! You're telling me I can't make a living?’ You know? ‘I wouldn't complain if you were doing it!’” This is a personal issue. This is neighbor against neighbor, livelihood against livelihood.

EH sees the origin of conflict as the top-down system that controls agriculture. It's a system that allows for a few people to make money off of the industry and a lot of people to be impacted negatively.

And not only does it I think create conflict between Neighbors, but probably inside a lot of the hearts of the livestock producers themselves. So, it's like Iowa agriculture is based off of this suite of myths: "We feed the world", "we're stewards of the land", and it's all lies that support this kind of facade around, what I said before, ecological sacrifice and a completely industrialized agriculture system, beyond the concept of sustainable. Conflict is inherent in such a top-down system. It's really saddening how much conflict it creates, though. Pig on pig, person on person.

EH falters at just citing a top-down system as the locus of conflict, as even lower directors at large agricultural corporations are complicit in the effects of industrial livestock production. EH makes it clear that she does not blame the local producer. Does she wish that they made some different decisions? Sure. She understands that there is a dilemma, a reason to be a producer: "he's hemmed in so hard by the market, and land-use history, land-use policies. I know what the farm bill does, and I know what the farm bill could do, and I know how hard it is to live with such amazing financial risks, as some of the producers around here do." But she also asserts that CAFO owners are responsible for the way that they affect communities. Yet ultimately it all comes back to corporate agriculture.

The policy of Cargill lobbyists, the Tyson people, they're making decisions about how much they want to pay for these animals. And so the housing, feed, and labor costs have to add up. The only way they can do that is in these shitty buildings with the animals all on top of each other.

Rather than lay the responsibility of these issues solely on the shoulders of producers, EH understand conflict driven by every level of our agricultural system.

The Community Member who is Not Involved in Agriculture Perspective

DC sees the origin of conflict simply being the intensification of agriculture. He takes issue with the idea that conflict is created by non-farmers moving out to the countryside and wondering what the smell is. Research he and CARES have conducted has revealed that something like 52% of the members have an agricultural background and aren't just city folk

who have no understanding of the realities of food production. It is ultimately the changes to the agricultural system that are driving unrest among communities.

The Conventional Farmer Perspective

WG and his wife have seen the movement of non-agricultural people into the countryside, and understand a lot of conflict stemming from them not being ready for the realities of living next to conventional agriculture. Should it not smell? They also cite a fundamental misunderstanding of how food production works by those who would oppose conventional agriculture. WG's wife asks, "Well do they want pork? Do they want bacon?" While WG adds, "Yeah the food eventually goes to the grocery store but that isn't where it starts. Some people have no concept of where, you just go down to the store and it will always be there." WG asserts that some of the people who oppose conventional livestock production have just never been around livestock. His wife takes this assertion one step further, saying:

I said the biggest problem is with the change of people in our community. This is what happened 40 years ago, they're probably wouldn't have been as many complaints because everybody was Hometown people. Now we have got so many that have moved in little acreages or just purchased a house. They come from town.

To them, conflict stems from a naïve misunderstanding of what the production of meat actually entails, and the realities of living among pork and meat producers. To WG and his wife it is illogical to complain about the smell of livestock production, because what did they expect? It is illogical to complain about the treatment of animals because they do not have feelings are being treated as well as the method of production necessitates. Any romantic notions of agriculture that color peoples perspectives of livestock production are based on ignorance of what agriculture actually requires of land and of people. To WG conventional farming is better, more efficient, cleaner, and necessary. For this last point he cites his neighbor to whom he rents his land: "like Dave says, he don't do it for the fun of it."

The Confinement Compliance Professional Perspective

RR believes that conflict stems from a complete lack of communication. As part of her job RR attends hearings and supervisor meetings to represent her producer clients and talk about

manure management compliance. She describes a disconnect between what people ask for and what producers are already implementing on their property.

So the people that are there are not a fan of confinement buildings. Some of the things that they were very passionate about and very vocal about, that they thought needed to be changed, had actually changed. And that we are doing what they've asked. And so there's a disconnect. Some of the stuff that's been asked for is already being done.

A gap that needs to be bridged is an awareness of what many smaller pork producers are actually doing to make their operations more sustainable. She explained that farmers are already paying a lot of money to comply with regulation, costs high to test soil on all of their acreages and pay the DNR fees. She wishes that there could be frank communication about how confinements exist in communities, a realization that, "No farmer wants their manure to go down the creek, that's never the plan." Farmers don't want the manure to run into the creek, and aren't legally allowed to discharge into any water body in the state of Iowa.

A lack of communication and transparency is compounded with the bad attitudes that shoe up at county hearings. RR is irked by the combative nature of communication between both sides: "...just because I feel one way about the issue doesn't mean I can't listen to you without making noise or booing, or clapping, or you know being an adult." RR believes that all conflict stems from the lack of communication and the premeditated hostility that characterizes interactions between conventional farmers and those opposed to industrial livestock production.

Discussion

It is clear from these five interviews that the impact of livestock production is complex, and that different groups of people have developed very different attitudes towards livestock production through their livelihoods and experiences. The answers given to the interview questions echo a lot of the same themes that are found in the literature surrounding these issues. People like EH and RD experience the negative odor effects CAFOs are known for (US EPA; How do CAFOs Impact the Environment? 2014), while conventional farmers like WG understand the increase in efficiency and ease for farmers who raise pork, as well as the economic incentives that exist for those who sign production contracts (Wright et al. 2001). Each truth found in a single perspective given by literature exists in the responses to our interview questions. On their own they convey valid experiences with agriculture, but an oversimplified

understanding of livestock production in Iowa. It is when these responses are put into conversation with one another that the full complexity of the impact of livestock production becomes clear. Overwhelmingly our participants informed us that there is a strong presence of conflict over livestock production in Iowa. But the locus of this conflict is far more complicated than “the farmer” or “the corporation”, as evidenced by the experiences of the five case studies examined in this paper.

Understanding that there is a multiplicity of experiences with agriculture and conflict is only the first step. Perhaps the most interesting question not examined in the results section was when the participants were asked what their ideal relationship with livestock production was. If they could wave a magic wand and make the agricultural system function in any way they wanted it to, what would it look like? At first participants answered in ways that would be expected of their position in the issue. RD wants land to be put back into pasture, and for CAFOs to become a thing of the past in Iowa. EH wants a reimagining of the farm bill, a dismantling of the top-down agricultural system that makes way for long-term agricultural planning that prioritizes justice and sustainability. DC wants a change in regulatory structure that is more ecologically driven, paired with the retirement of CAFOs. WG wishes that some of the confinements wouldn't have quite the same stench as they currently permeate, but also that people educated themselves more on livestock and food production in America, and the necessity of efficiency and confinement operations. RR wants all types of agriculture to exist harmoniously, and for people to be able to make their own decisions about what type of livestock production they supported. If the market supports organically produced meat, then that will dictate how the bulk of meat is produced. She wishes for all of us to attempt transparency and understanding when it comes to disagreements over livestock production.

But there's a thread of similarity that runs through all of the interviews. Livestock production is personal, often tied closely with ideals of heritage, livelihood, and property rights. What connects these idyllic imaginings of agriculture is a desire for local control. As evidenced by the diversity of responses to our interview questions, different areas and communities will respond to industrial livestock production differently. Local or township level control of regulations and compliance would allow the interests of local communities to be prioritized in decision making, rather than the current pattern of the interests of the corporations superseding any other considerations.

Thinking normatively, local control can only be a part of the solution. As evidenced by RR's experiences at county hearings, people are approaching this issue with a premeditated combativeness. It seems that, though often unspoken, the locus of conflict cannot be entirely separated from the issue of communication. Though experiences with conflict cannot be condensed into a packaged solution, more frank communication can only serve to better our communities.

Clues for how to compromise on these issues lie in no singular response to our questioning. Rather it is through examining the experiences of these five very different people in conversation that perhaps we can move in a better direction when it comes to handling disagreements over livestock production. While one's own understanding of CAFOs could be echoed by one of our participants, by reading the experiences of another person with a diverse perspective we can hope to understand why conflict occurs over livestock production practices, and make an effort acknowledge the complexity of livestock production beyond pollutive negative effects or positive economic ones.

Of course, these observations are based solely on the responses of ten individuals. Many people did not respond to our recruitment, and we struggled to access the perspective of the conventional farmer. This document is by no means a comprehensive overview of the full spectrum of complex opinions and experiences found in Iowa. It is only through striving to understand and listen to more new and different perspectives that we can keep trying to reach compromise and peace. Further research is needed to increase our understanding of how to enhance our ability to compromise over these issues, with special emphasis on accessing the perspective of the conventional farmer.

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