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October 8, 2009

Agri News  
Mychal Wilmes, Managing Editor  
18 1st Ave. SE  
Rochester, MN 55903-6118

Dear Mr. Wilmes:

The editorial “U of M heads down a dangerous path with research deals” printed in Agri News October 1, 2009, misses the point of public-private cooperation involving a land grant university serving a state’s production agriculture sector. (And the editorial’s fleeting reference to the University of Minnesota’s licensing deal on apple varieties may have been a fit for the headline of the piece, but that’s it.) Also, the tone in which the editorial is written, with intended negative inferences involving “large-scale commercial” dairies and “vertical integrated” operations smacks of fear mongering that most of the rest of the state’s agriculture sector has moved beyond.

The new relationship between the University of Minnesota, specifically the College of Veterinary Medicine, and the Davis family’s 3,000+ cow New Sweden Dairy should be commended, not castigated by innuendo and inference. The arrangement makes complete sense on financial grounds to leverage public-private resources, and more importantly, for the benefits it will bestow on the region’s dairy industry, farmers, and veterinary students and practitioners.

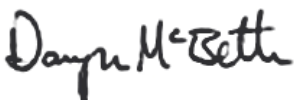
The new Dairy Education Center at New Sweden Dairy will train veterinary students and other practitioners with hands on experience at a state-of-the-art new dairy. Yes, New Sweden Dairy is part of a “vertically integrated” system and is of a larger scale than average size dairy operations in Minnesota. But with this backdrop comes amazing teaching and research opportunities. The sheer number of cows, calves, births, and milking experiences that a student will have access to at this large scale dairy and teaching hospital speaks volumes alone. Minnesota’s dairy farmers deserve their cows and livelihood be exposed to animal care professionals who have experience working on as many cows as possible, just as we look for experienced medical physicians who have successfully treated as many patients as possible.

The editorial suggests that the same opportunities and benefits would have been better matched with one of the University’s existing Research & Outreach Centers. Or with other “fine dairies in Minnesota that could benefit from hosting veterinary students.” Dairy research and veterinary teaching opportunities at other locations like these won’t go away, but to compare such a match up for the new Dairy Education Center is again missing the point. With the facilities, professional supervision, and incredible number of opportunities for on-site learning at New Sweden Dairy and the “in the field” teaching hospital, Minnesota dairy farmers may embrace the opportunity to shed what can be distractive and piecemeal “research” visits to their farm operations.

Contrary to the editorial, University of Minnesota research is not “done to benefit the highest bidder.” The entire state dairy industry will benefit from this new partnership far more than just the host site. Incidentally, I hope the editors were not suggesting profitability is a bad thing – as our state’s dairy producers could use some optimism for their balance sheets right now. Any way a dairy operation can reduce costs or increase profitability with the help of veterinary services should be embraced.

This new partnership will allow University faculty and future practitioners (students) to parley numerous benefits for the edification of the entire region’s dairy industry – and all Minnesota dairy farms. How the editorial concludes this can’t be a “win-win” for Minnesota’s dairy farmers is a mystery to me.

Sincerely,



Daryn McBeth, President  
Minnesota Agri-Growth Council