



Face Off at Standing Rock



Dakota Access Pipe Line Protestors

Brendan Wegner was also just 21 when he left Montello, WI for ND with promises of making \$100,000 per year – instead he died on his first day on the job, Sept. 14th, 2011. Another worker, Ray Hardy, died a day late from his horrific burns at the same blast, while a third worker, Michael Twinn, committed suicide after having both of his lower legs amputated. OSHA investigators found numerous safety violations—such as the fact that the workers were not wearing proper flame retardant clothing – but the owner, Oasis Petroleum based in TX, was shielded from any liability because the workers were all hired by a subcontractor, Carlson Well Service.

DAPL is on Shaky Financial Ground

The \$3.8 billion DAPL scheme itself remains on very shaky financial ground. According to oil experts, the Bakken fields are not profitable when crude falls below \$70 per barrel and that has been the case for many months (as of late Dec. oil was around \$52 per barrel). While many U.S. consumers are thrilled that prices are so low at the gas pump, the finance giants such as Wells Fargo, Chase Manhattan, Bank of America, and BMO Harris are apoplectic since they have gambled heavily on DAPL, and are now facing major losses from their risky speculation with investors' money. Across



DAPL Protestors send the message!

the globe a growing fossil fuel divestment campaign, in many cases led by activated students on college campuses, is also making an impact (<http://www.defunddapl.org/>). A delegation of Sami reindeer herders which visited Standing Rock earlier this fall returned to Scandinavia and promptly forced DNB, Norway's largest bank, to divest \$3 million from DAPL on Nov. 17th.

"It is natural that we would try to help Standing Rock. It is easy for Indigenous people around the world to recognize the struggle. We see what they are going through and we feel it. There is no them,

only us," said Beaska Niillas, chairman of the Norwegian Sami Association, quoted in a Nov. 28th Truthout article by Alexis Bonogofsky.

An Unsuccessful Petition

An unsuccessful Nov. 20th petition from Bold Nebraska to the White House asking Pres. Obama to declare Standing Rock a National Monument grimly notes: "The election of Donald Trump to be our next president – a man who says land can be taken by private corporations against farmers and Tribal Nations' legal rights, and who wants to do all he can to increase the use of fossil fuel – means the stakes are higher than ever now in our fight to protect our land, water and climate." Whether it is challenging the Enbridge 61 tar sands pipeline across WI – that would have twice the capacity of the Keystone XL – or the Sabal Trail natural gas pipeline across AL and GA to Osceola County, FL, many of us will be facing our own version of the "Black Snake" in the year to come. Hopefully the indigenous resistance and native wisdom of Standing Rock will inspire many others in this larger struggle to ensure a better future based upon peace and justice for all.

For the latest on the Standing Rock struggle visit: <http://standwithstandingrock.net/>

Where Have All the Dairy Farmers Gone?

By Siena Chrisman, EcoCentric Blog

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY GRACE 10/27/16

Robin Fitch's husband has been a dairy farmer since 1976; the family has been milking 175 cows near Cooperstown, New York, for the last ten years. Her 25-year-old son, Justin, is desperate to take over: "It's the only thing he wants to do," she says. It's unlikely that he will get that chance, because the family is seriously considering getting out of the business. Their days start at 4 a.m. for milking and chores, and she has two part-time jobs, but the family is only barely making ends meet.



Gretchen Maine, who lives nearby in Waterville, New York, got out in 2015. She was undergoing treatment for kidney cancer, leaving her 77-year-old husband milking cows alone. Looking at the direction milk prices were going, the couple decided to sell their hundred cows and get out of dairy farming. "It was a hard decision," Maine says, "but it was the only decision. With the price of milk going to crash, there was just no sensible reason to keep on going."

Fourth-generation Wisconsin farmer Joel Greeno sold his 80 cows in 2013. Eighteen months later, milk prices hit a record high. At the time he sold the cows, Greeno says, "prices weren't the worst, but they still weren't good." He was recovering from emergency surgery and would have had to buy additional animals in order to financially stabilize the farm; the family was wary of going into debt on a future as uncertain as dairy farming and decided to get out. He sold some of the cows for half of what he had paid, and says if he had waited six months, both milk and cattle prices

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increased so much that he could have gotten three times that – "but that's the volatility of the dairy market."

47,000 Farms Closed Down

In rural areas, you don't have to look far to find these stories. Over 47,000 dairy farms have closed down or consolidated since 2000. Milk production has not slowed; it is being produced on fewer larger farms. In 1997, US farmers were milking 9.1 million cows on 125,000 farms; by 2012, there were nearly 9.3 million dairy cows on just 64,000 farms. Like many industries, dairy farms benefit from economies of scale: larger operations are more economically efficient in terms of equipment, land and other resources. However, large dairy

operations also externalize many of their costs, drawing excessive water from local aquifers, polluting air and water with manure disposal and consolidating wealth from the community rather than supporting a wide network of thriving businesses.

The Maze of Milk Pricing

In dairy, as most farming sectors, there is enormous pressure to "get big or get out," echoing the directives of Richard Nixon's Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz. The pressure for small farmers like Fitch, Maine and Greeno is felt in their balance sheets and wallets every day, and it's getting worse: nationally, the price farmers receive for milk has fallen nearly thirty-five percent since a high in September 2014, from \$26 to \$17 per hundredweight (about twelve gallons). For the average small farmer milking under 200 cows, a hundred weight of milk costs around \$22 to produce, not even including their own labor. That's a loss to the farmer of five dollars with every twelve gallons that leave the farm.

Continued pg 8