



Riverview Dairy public meeting focuses on past, present, and future

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Those who attended the Riverview Dairy public meeting on April 9 were able to learn about the history of the dairy, current happenings and hopes for the future. The event was a way for the public to learn more about Riverview Dairy and the hope for an expansion project at West River Dairy south of Morris.

Attendees were able to go on a multi-station tour explaining various aspects of the dairy. If not wanting to do this, they could just ask questions of the Riverview employees sprinkled throughout the Morris National Guard Armory where the event was held. A lot of questions were asked both during tours or in one-on-one discussions.

The dairy also sponsored a free meal of Cattlemen's grilled burgers and malts. The Cattlemen grilled over 400 burgers, a testament that the event was well-attended.

At the first station on the tour, you were told about the history of Riverview Dairy. This dates back to 1939 when Paul Fehr Sr. started a dairy on his farm near Morris. The first Riverview Dairy was built in 1995 by his descendants.

Jared Wohlers and Martha Koehl, two of the tour guides, explained that the dairy was built with five core values - strong work ethic, spirit of humility, keep it simple, integrity, and candor. Koehl added "This is home for us." The dairy location is in the heart of the area farmed by Riverview.

The next station talked about the proposed expansion at West River Dairy and its timeline. Wohlers explained that there are six steps in the process and Riverview is right in the middle between steps 3 and 4.

Step one was the growing interest in expansion which was explained in further documentation stating that the global market is growing and the need for more dairy products is on demand. The next step was reaching out to the local community to get feedback.

Step 3 is the State Permitting process. For this, Riverview completed applications, required documentation and then an Environmental Assessment Worksheet. The inventory of current feedlots was also part of this process. The project overall began in 2022, and the permit is currently open for public comment.

The next step is to get state approval. The state will be taking all these documents into consideration before approving the project. The fifth step is then a local process where the project must be approved by the County Commission. before beginning construction at step 6. Once approved, construction typically takes around two years to complete.

Many people question the water supply for this large-scale expansion. West River Dairy has a well located three miles away that taps into a deeper aquifer than most wells in the area. The proposed water use will be less than half of a volume previously found by DNR to be sustainable from this off-site well. They also have plans to capture water on-site and store this in storm water ponds. The captured water can be used for the cows, washing and misting. Any water that touches the manure will also be captured but used as fertilizer for the fields. The captured water will lower the amount to be drawn out of the wells.

The dairy is also designed to be neighbor friendly. The stalls are cleaned twice a day in order to avoid flies and smells. Good housekeeping practices are constantly in use. Manure pits are synthetically covered with an automated covering system. The milking parlors are cleaned every 12 hours.

The manure from the pits are directly injected into the soil once per year after fall harvest. This is applied per state approved management plans. Riverview sells the manure as a fertilizer source to local farmers near the dairy. The manure from the proposed expansion would become a fertilizer source for 7,700 acres. The fertilizer helps with the growth yearly of 5,000 acres of corn for silage, and 2,500 acres of alfalfa.

Another station provided some facts about the expansion. The project will add 11,000 cows at the West River site. There will be 40 new employees and help to keep many talented people in the area. There will be 106 new stalls in the rotary parlors and an additional 11 loads of milk will leave the dairy each day.

Riverview has been a vital part of the community and area. They have a Riverview Foundation where funding requests are submitted regularly with a focus on schools, cities and emergency services. They donate dairy products for events that take place throughout the year. This year 53 high school seniors will be awarded \$3,000 scholarships through the Riverview Connect Scholarship program. There are also Internship opportunities for college students to get experience in all types of work.

The estimated economic annual impact is \$6 million in payroll, \$150,000 in county taxes, \$700,000 in annual repairs and \$850,000 in annual utilities. There will also be an increase in customer base for local businesses and more job opportunities. The school systems will also see an increase in students.

There is a lot happening at Riverview Dairy in Stevens County and the public meeting was the perfect opportunity for residents to learn more about the past, present and future of the dairy.