

Goat Farm Owners to Take Operation Outside of Jefferson County

Matt Gardner | Posted: Monday, March 28, 2016 3:13 pm

The possibility of a 9,000-goat farm in Jefferson County is no more after the owners of the dairy who wanted to build the farm in the county has made a verbal agreement to buy land in a different county.

Kenn Buelow, co-owner of Drumlin Dairy, said he has a verbal agreement to buy a 35-acre plot of land to build the structure needed for his company's 9,000-goat milking operation.

"We don't have a location signed yet. It is outside of Jefferson County though," Buelow said.

Drumlin Dairy was close to an agreement to buy a 225-acre plot of land in the town of Aztalan, but the owners backed out at the last minute. The goat farm would have been located on the corner of Harvey Road and Mansfield Road.

Buelow said at a Citizens For a Better Environment in Lake Mills meeting in Lake Mills March 17 he was looking at sites in Rock County, Lafayette County and Calumet County. The two dairy farms Holsum Dairies owns are in Calumet County.

The plan was to have a 9,000-animal goat farm, with the goats housed in nine pens, allowing them to roam freely. The primary use of the farm would be the production of goat milk to be made into goat-cheese. If built, the farm would be the largest goat farm in the U.S., but it would not match a 10,000-goat farm in the Shaanxi province in southwest China that is expected to expand to 100,000 goats in a few years, according to a recent Wisconsin State Journal article.

There was a lot of pressure on Drumlin to get the deal done as soon as possible for a variety of reasons.

For one, Buelow said he would like to have the nine-acre goat farm built and ready for production by next spring.

That was not going to happen given all of the regulations Jefferson County has for its farm operations. The county had approved a conditional use permit for Drumlin but the company hit a snag when the landowners in the town of Aztalan backed out late last month.

Also, the Aztalan Town Board of Supervisors, on a 2-1 vote Feb. 1, voted to approve a conditional-use permit for the farm with several conditions. Those conditions were designed to reimburse the town for road repairs for excessive wear and tear on Harvey and Mansfield roads due to increased semi-truck traffic and to pay for any modifications or expansions necessary to

accommodate the expected increase in truck traffic at the intersection of Harvey and Mansfield roads.

And with the plan of having the farm built by January of next year, Drumlin was on a time crunch to try to get a deal done.

“We’re in the process of gathering the animals. The process takes a certain amount of time, and we had that accounted for in our first process,” Buelow said. “Now, that didn’t occur, so it took away some of the time we had allotted.”

Buelow said the farm will start with 3,000 kids and slowly make its way up to 9,000 goats in the first 2 1/2 years. Drumlin planned on having three birthing seasons throughout a given year, which concerned CBE members, as the possibility for the spread of diseases such as Q Fever rises during birthing seasons.

The other reason for the time crunch on the construction of the goat farm is the need for increased goat-cheese production in Wisconsin.

In a Wisconsin State Journal article last week, Montchevre-Betin Inc. President and co-owner Arnold Solandt said his company collects 100 million pounds annually from dairy goat farms in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and northern Missouri.

Montchevre is the largest producer of goat-cheese in the U.S., but still falls about 20 percent short of the goat milk it needs each year to produce what it needs.

“There’s not a sufficient supply (of goat milk) when I talk to processors. We’re expecting to put out a semi-truck load of goat milk a day plus a little bit more,” Buelow said.

Some Lake Mills area residents were dubious of the size and scale of Drumlin’s operation. At CBE’s public meeting March 17, citizens expressed doubts over Drumlin’s manure processing and of the possibility for outbreak of diseases that are goat-specific.

Originally, Drumlin Dairy had plans for pelletizing its manure, but Buelow explained at the CBE meeting those plans were no more. Instead, the company would be composting its manure and covering it to prevent run-off.

In the future, Buelow said Drumlin could look at expanding its operations and coming back to Jefferson County. But, that would depend on how well its first farm does and on how much of a need for goat-cheese manufacturers in the state.

“We would look throughout the site depending on location and where the processors are but that would be dependent on how this first farm goes,” Buelow said.

Holsum Dairies has participated in the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources’ Green Tier program, which requires environmental management standards that go well beyond standard

requirements. In 2012, Holsum Dairies was chosen as a national winner in the inaugural U.S. Dairy Sustainability Awards by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy

Buelow said Drumlin will work with the community that accommodates its operation.

“We always work with people to try to minimize impact on both the individuals and the environment. If you look at our history with the dairies, you can see that we’ve worked with neighbors and the environment,” Buelow said.