

The Times Standard's editorial a few weeks ago sided with Rex Bohn in his dubious claim that the county's dairy industry would suffer fatally from a PR disaster, that would surely occur, should Little Timmy get sick from drinking raw milk sold in Humboldt County. I think that concern is misplaced. The threat is really about small, family dairies, versus huge, industrial dairies better known as CAFOs – containment animal feeding operations.

In 1971 the Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, sped up the process of destroying the family farm by telling farmers to "Get Big or Get Out." In 1970, there were 658,000 dairy farms in the U. S. By 2006 that number had fallen to 75,000 and by 2012 it dropped to 58,000. And the plunge continues. In Humboldt county during that same time period there were approximately 260 small dairy farms; today there are around 60.

But in the same period, the number of mega-farms with more than 2,000 cows doubled. Today, 2,000 cow dairies are small potatoes compared to industrial dairies of 30,000 plus cows. Even in the organic sector, mega dairies with 14,000 cows plus are gobbling up the market.

A major rule for a dairy to receive organic certification is that the cows must be on pasture for a minimum of 120 days a year. Whether CAFO farms are actually organic is the real question. 14,000 cows would require hundreds of acres of grass pasture per day. Do you think that is possible?

The current Secretary of Agriculture made the statement recently that the organic rules are unfair for large operators because it is tough for them to comply. With the blessing of the USDA, CAFOs continue to grow to the point that about half of the organic milk sold in the U.S. is coming from very large factory farms that are not living up to organic principles. Who takes the fall? The little guy of course!

There are only about 150 small, family owned and operated organic dairies left in CA, with approximately 60 of them in our county. Add in Del Norte, Sonoma and Marin and we have a big problem brewing on the North coast and it doesn't have anything to do with legalizing the sale of raw milk here in Humboldt. By the way it is already legal in those other counties.

So, I'd like to ask Mr. Bohn and the Times Standard if our dairies will weather the disaster coming our way with the constant under mining of the organic standards to satisfy the mega dairies. I'm for organic raw and organic pasteurized joining forces to fight the threat, but that's just me.