

## **The Sainte Marie de Kent Hog Factory— a Short History**

It came the same way it appears to be leaving: stealthily.

The biggest hog factory east of Manitoba seems to be leaving Sainte Marie de Kent, or at least that is what the indications are. No one will confirm it but unofficial word from unnamed sources in the government, as well as indirect statements from employees of the operation, indicate that Metz Farms 2 operations in Sainte Marie de Kent have finally come to an end after six years of rancorous and polarised debate. No one, locally, could be neutral.

On the side of Metz Farms were lined up the proponent, Metz Farms, its various subsidiaries and client companies; the New Brunswick Government, including both the Liberal Party of New Brunswick that invited and provided incentives to locate in New Brunswick and, later, the Conservative Party of New Brunswick that was responsible for licencing and providing, via various subsidies and assistance, ongoing support to the operation; the Times Transcript, the local English newspaper, that provided continuing media support, editorial approval and condemnation of the opponents of the operation; Larry Jewett, the prime agitator who was a partner of Metz in the beginning, in a partnership that called itself Kent AgriDevelopment and was the original promoter of both the hog factory and what was to be a large cattle breeding operation; the New Brunswick Federation of Agriculture; and a few of the local farmers who had contracted with Metz to receive hog manure on their fields.

On the other side were most of the population of Sainte Marie, Bouctouche and South East Kent County; a number of environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and the Conservation Council of New Brunswick; most of the Francophone media, including Radio Beausejour and l'Étoile, our community radio station and weekly newspaper, respectively; the National Farmers Union; and a number of world renowned environmentalists.

The battle between the proponents and the opponents continued for six years, costing the community hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees and thousands of hours in volunteer work. The citizens were forced to hold lotteries, rallies, and various other fund-raisers to help pay the legal costs of defending themselves against SLAPP suits (basically frivolous lawsuits designed to silence opposition by scaring the defendants and forcing them to spend thousands of dollars in defending themselves) launched by the owners of the hog factory and, eventually, the citizen's own law suit against the hog factory and its supporters in a bid to legally force the operation to close.

Other tactics that were used by the citizens over the years included petitions (with more than five thousand signatures each); demonstrations, both locally and in Fredericton, where a petition was ceremonially presented to Elizabeth Weir who agreed, in turn, to present it to the Legislature (Ms. Weir is the leader of the New Brunswick NDP, the only political party in New Brunswick that supported the citizens of Sainte Marie); a visit to the office of the local Department of Agriculture in Bouctouche that eventually turned into a two week occupation culminating in the Premier appointing a committee to study the situation; and a campaign that involved sending boxes of algae to the members of the Legislature, earning the protesters the epithet of eco-terrorists by the editor of the Times Transcript.

It is hard to say what finally led to the apparent cessation of operations at the factory. Possibly it was a combination and accumulation of factors, both economic and political. Some of the problems that have beset the operation were undoubtedly caused by the opponents. The law suit that was commenced against the hog factory and its supporters appears to have convinced some of the manure recipients to reconsider accepting manure and to not renew their contracts. The pressure would then have been on the hog factory to find enough land to spread their manure: the community pasture that was the heart of the spreading system was certainly not large enough for the quantity of manure being spread.

It could be surmised that a pending lawsuit would not be attractive to potential investors or the hog factory's insurance company. Also, from the point of view of the insurance company, on two occasions large sections of the barn roof collapsed and Metz, in an attempt to recoup the cost of reconstruction, filed suit against both his insurance company and the company that made the roof trusses. It would appear that the hog factory lost both suits as the building apparently, did not meet specifications for construction in this part of the country and, as such, it is unlikely that the owners of the company would ever be able to obtain insurance on the building. Unofficial sources claimed that the owner of the hog factory met with provincial government officials in an attempt to get the province to help with the cost of rebuilding, estimated at almost one million dollars. The government, with only a very slim majority and with the possibility of having to go to the electorate on a moment's notice, apparently refused to provide any more cash.

Furthermore, with a number of successful, multi-million dollar law suits against other factory farms, both in Canada and the U.S., where companies have been found guilty of polluting both the air and water in surrounding communities, insurance companies are becoming extremely reluctant to provide coverage that could leave them liable for damages and the cost of cleaning up after the hogs are gone.

Another complicating factor was the purchase of Hub Meat Packers in Moncton and Larsen's in Berwick, Nova Scotia, by Maple Leaf Foods. In order to rationalize production, Maple Leaf closed the kill floor at Hub and hogs from all over the Maritimes are now shipped to Nova Scotia for slaughter. The extra cost of transportation would add considerably to the costs of production at Metz as they would have to absorb at least a part of this cost themselves.

It is doubtful that Metz Farms will be missed in Sainte Marie and, from what we understand, it is unlikely that Sainte Marie will be missed by them. It would appear that the owner and manager have gone on to other ventures and have set up a new company calling itself "Maritime Pride" to produce eggs and meat chickens.. The company appears to be centred in Berwick, Nova Scotia, and would seem to have either built or bought a number of poultry factories in that area, but retaining their original head quarters in New Canaan, New Brunswick, where it is said they continue to produce weaner hogs for sale to other operators for fattening.

To conclude, it would be nice to think that people might learn from this experience and perhaps, with some form of land zoning and more local control over development, it might be possible. However, it seems that money always talks louder than people and, no matter what the catalyst was for the end of this unfortunate experiment, in the final analysis, it will still be money, or its lack, on the part of the promoters that ends it: not a concern for the health and well being of a community.

The one positive result from six years of stink and suffering is that, for many in the community, the fight provided a catalyst to meet and get to know one's neighbours. Sainte Marie is made up of people who work locally, people who work in Moncton, and, in the summer, a number of temporary residents who return each year to, what is often, their original homes. The fight against the hogs coalesced most of the community into a group united against a common problem. Unfortunately, it also split families and friendships, creating wounds that will probably take years to heal.

UPDATE: The government announced last week that Metz had officially surrendered his operating licence five weeks previously. In typical transparent(ha ha)manner it took a reporter (not with the Irving chain of papers) to force the government to make the announcement