

For immediate release

Citizens Voice Opposition to Proposed Factory Farm

*Wise Development in Cochise County
Holds Neighborhood Informational Meeting*

About 40 people voiced strong opposition to a proposed factory farm near Sunizona during a neighborhood informational meeting of the citizen group, Wise Development in Cochise County, on Saturday, April 4, at the Sunizona Community Center. The meeting comes as Sunizona residents and the Cochise County Planning and Zoning Commission await the filing of a Special Use permit to construct and operate a 15,000-head dairy factory by Cochise residents Alvin “Buddy” Ratliff and his wife, Christine, on 160 acres of land in the small community of Sunizona, located 30 miles south of Willcox.

The proposed factory farm has been a controversial topic in the Sunizona area since March 2, when Ratliff publicly announced, during a regular meeting of the Sunizona-Ash Creek Community Association, that he will be asking the planning commission to approve the use of the land to house 7,500 milkers and 7,500 other head of cattle. Ratliff said he already owns the site of the proposed mega dairy, located on the southwest corner of Bell Ranch Road and Kester Lane in Sunizona. At the March 2 meeting, Ratliff said he would be seeking to re-zone the land for industrial use, but since that time county officials have said that he has announced his intention to file for a Special Use permit instead. Ratliff said he and other unnamed investors will construct the facility at a cost of \$25-30 million.

Property owners in the area formed the group, Wise Development in Cochise County (WDCC), in mid-March after hearing of Ratliff’s plans to build the factory farm. The group’s stated mission is to monitor, hold forums on, and report on proposed land developments that have the potential to erode the quality of life and the health and safety of the community.

During the meeting, residents expressed a wide range of concerns.

Lisa Jackson, who raises Andalucian horses on her property just north of the proposed factory farm site, expressed her concern at the meeting about mosquito control. “It’s not just for the animals [that worries her], it’s for us also. We spend a lot of time outdoors”, said Jackson.

Jose Contreras, who lives close to the Faria dairy on Kansas Settlement Road, related that he has been unable to sell his property for the past two years, due, in his opinion, to its proximity to that large dairy.

Shawn Aspinall, who lives about a mile from the proposed site, expressed his concern about light pollution. He said that although he is several miles from the Faria dairy, he can see the “glow from over there” at night.

Kathleen Day-Cain, a member of WDCC and a Sunizona resident, said she is concerned for friends of hers who live between the Faria dairy and the proposed Ratliff site. “These people are hard workers. They have worked hard their whole lives to buy this property”, and now will be forced to live with a proposed factory farm next to them. Day-Cain also mentioned an earth fissure that opened up south of the Faria dairy after it went into operation, and related that her friends are bothered by vibrations and noise coming from that dairy.

Liz Shuler-Pointer, who lives about two miles from the proposed site, said that 50-100 percent of the money needed to construct the factory farm would be coming from outside investors. Ratliff stated at the March 2 Sunizona-Ash Creek Association meeting that he immediately would be looking for buyers for the proposed operation.

The WDCC meeting agenda included an introduction to the WDCC’s purpose and objectives, a question-and-answer session, a talk on the human health aspects of the proposed factory farm, and a rebuttal on perceived benefits to area farmers.

WDCC also plans to circulate a petition against the proposed factory farm soon (it has created an online petition at <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/stop-the-ratliff-mega-dairy>). Additionally, group members are meeting weekly, developing letters to send to area residents, planning additional information meetings, and monitoring Ratliff’s Special Use permit filing status.

The informational meeting was the first of a series of meetings planned by the group. For more information or to volunteer, contact WDCC group members at 520-507-0806, 520-559-2140, or 520-824-3482, or email wisedevelopmentincochisecounty@yahoo.com.