



Dodge County, Inc. Big Ag and the Undoing of Rural America

Sonja Trom Eayrs

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The devastation wrought upon US farming communities is tracked in Sonja Trom Eayrs's courageous book *Dodge County, Inc.*, in which the family farm that Eayrs grew up on becomes a microcosmic example of the ills afflicting thousands of rural towns and private farmers.

From the frontlines of the fight against factory farming, the book delves into the harrowing details of how “Big Pork” pushed small towns to the brink of ruin, corrupting the political and regulatory bodies meant to protect them. In little more than a decade, concentrated animal feeding operations sprang up and polluted the air, water, and soil that generations had cared for. Eayrs indicts this as an intentional campaign to make areas unlivable and says that millions of gallons of animal waste were poured on fields abutting family farms when their residents called attention to the CAFOs' health violations.

The book braids such local stories into its intrepid reportage, resulting in a portrait of a country in crisis. Facts and figures about the environmental repercussions of keeping tens of thousands of livestock producing more waste than major cities within a three-mile radius are threaded into Eayrs's stories of her family going up against the “hog gang.” Revelations of regulators going on vacation rather than addressing malpractice complaints, and of a business leader vacating his position one day before being served to derail a lawsuit, illuminate the issues further. Still, against such enormous odds and tragic losses, the book articulates an optimistic vision of a more just, regulated future, celebrating the significant victories eked out in places like Winona County, Minnesota, where a concerted local outcry halted a large industrial operation.

Rooted in the intimate experiences of Sonja Trom Eayrs's farming family, *Dodge County, Inc.* is a powerful manifesto against the excesses of factory farming.

WILLEM MARX (November / December 2024)

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