

November 17, 2024

Via email

Seth Bahler, CEO
 Oakridge Dairy LLC
 [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Bahler,

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Inc. (“PETA”) to demand that Oakridge Dairy LLC (“Oakridge Dairy”) immediately cease its false and misleading marketing claims, including that its milk comes from “happy cows,”¹ and the following related statements that:

- the company provides “an exceptional level of care”² and “exceptional animal welfare standards”³ for cows at its facilities;
- Oakridge Dairy cows enjoy “an optimal living habitat,”⁴ and “posh living quarters,”⁵ including “an open-stall barn that allows cows to walk around as they please”⁶ and “plenty of elbow room,”⁷ for them to “spend their days relaxing among their peers;”⁸ and
- Oakridge Dairy’s milking process “ensures the [cows’] wellbeing,”⁹ creates “a haven”¹⁰ for them, and “ensur[es] maximum comfort and efficiency,”¹¹ as well as “long-term health.”¹²

A whistleblower contacted PETA out of concern for the welfare of the cows being intensively confined at Oakridge Dairy’s facilities to exploit them for profit. Subsequent eyewitness footage obtained by PETA investigators during a public tour of Oakridge Dairy’s facilities and veterinary and farmed animal welfare experts’

¹ *Welcome*, Oakridge Dairy, <https://www.oakridgedairy.com/> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024); *Milk*, Oakridge Dairy, <https://www.oakridgedairy.com/milk> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024); *Barns*, Oakridge Dairy, <https://www.oakridgedairy.com/barns> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024). In addition to “happy” and “happy cows” claims on the company’s website, Oakridge Dairy claims its milk comes from “happy cows” on packaging for milk sold through local delivery service, the Modern Milkman. *Milk*, The Modern Milkman, <https://us.modernmilkman.com/products/milk> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024).

² *Milk*, Oakridge Dairy, *supra* note 1.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Cows*, Oakridge Dairy, <https://www.oakridgedairy.com/cows> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *The Magic of Oakridge Dairy*, Oakridge Dairy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9H10HELcow> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Our Story*, The Modern Milkman, <https://us.modernmilkman.com/our-story> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024).

¹² *Home*, The Modern Milkman, <https://www.modernmilkman.com/home/> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024).

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opinions¹³ on the documented conditions corroborate the whistleblower’s report and reveal that Oakridge Dairy’s referenced claims are false and misleading.

Despite the company’s claims, Oakridge Dairy’s cows are not provided meaningfully higher animal welfare standards compared to the average conditions found on intensive dairy farms. The eyewitness footage revealed that thousands of Oakridge Dairy cows are crowded together in a concrete-floored mega-shed, where the company exploits them before sending them for slaughter. According to the company’s employees, cows are permanently kept indoors so that their manure can be collected and converted to natural gas, leaving the barn only to be hooked up three times a day to a robotic milking machine. Oakridge Dairy sends cows to slaughter when they are, on average, six to seven years old, well before they reach even half of their natural lifespan of about 20 years.¹⁴ The eyewitness footage also revealed that many cows suffer from serious health issues, including swollen joints and apparent pressure sores or abrasions on their legs, all of which cause the cows great pain and distress. At least one cow could not even bear her own weight, and many others’ legs and tails were covered in feces. Additionally, an Oakridge Dairy worker admitted that the company inhumanely separates cows from their babies within 20 minutes of birth, and during a public tour, young calves were kept on display in hutches near loud vehicle noises.

Oakridge Dairy makes several false and misleading claims that cows at its farm enjoy “an optimal living habitat,”¹⁵ “plenty of elbow room,”¹⁶ and “posh living quarters”¹⁷ “ensuring maximum comfort and efficiency.”¹⁸ Cows are kept in excessively crowded conditions and appear unable to move around freely or find a comfortable spot to stand or lie down,¹⁹ all in stark contrast to Oakridge Dairy’s claims. The concrete floor at Oakridge Dairy causes hoof and leg discomfort and between cleanings the cows stand in urine and feces, which can lead to hoof infections.²⁰ Moreover, if cows lie down on the concrete, their joints are not supported and they may develop pressure sores.²¹ The swollen joints, sore feet, and skin abrasions—as shown in the eyewitness footage²²—all cause pain and distress to the cows and demand medical attention.²³

Moreover, cows thrive when they have access to outdoor pastures,²⁴ which Oakridge Dairy does not provide. An intensive farm like Oakridge Dairy strips cows of their natural behaviors, such as moving freely in the open air or having grass and dirt under their feet.²⁵ Cows’ interest in having access to the outdoors increases during the early morning and the evening, and denying cows the ability to fulfill this

¹³ Two independent and renowned experts in farmed animal welfare reviewed the footage of Oakridge Dairy’s facilities and provided opinions on the living conditions and welfare provided to cows. Dr. Mary Richardson DVM is a veterinary expert and former chair of the Ontario Solicitor General’s Animal Care Review Board (opinion cited as “Richardson (2024)”). Dr. Kurt D. Vogel, Ph.D. is the Director of the Humane Handling Institute and Professor of Animal Welfare and Behavior at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (opinion cited as “Vogel (2024)”).

¹⁴ *Welcome, Oakridge Dairy*, <https://www.oakridgedairy.com/> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024).

¹⁵ *Milk, Oakridge Dairy*, *supra* note 1.

¹⁶ *Cows, Oakridge Dairy*, *supra* note 5.

¹⁷ *Cows, Oakridge Dairy*, *supra* note 5.

¹⁸ *Our Story, The Modern Milkman*, *supra* note 12.

¹⁹ Richardson (2024).

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² In the section of the footage Dr. Richardson describes, several cows attached to the milking machine appeared to have inflamed joints and skin irritations and wounds. At least one of them appeared visibly uncomfortable, repeatedly lifting her reddened hoof due to pain.

²³ Richardson (2024).

²⁴ Richardson (2024); Vogel (2024).

²⁵ Richardson (2024).

interest leads to physical and psychological stress.²⁶ The young calves put on display, hearing the noise of vehicles, also live far from “optimal” or “comfortable” lives.²⁷ Exposing calves to unfamiliar people in chaotic and noisy environments causes them stress and discomfort, which can ultimately increase their susceptibility to disease.

Oakridge Dairy further falsely claims that their milking process “ensures the [cows’] wellbeing”²⁸ and their “long-term health.”²⁹ However, cows in the dairy industry often develop mastitis, a painful inflammation of the mammary glands which leads to higher levels of white blood cells, pus, and bacteria in their milk.³⁰ Scientific studies have found that cows subjected to automated milking systems, like those used by Oakridge Dairy, may suffer from deteriorating udder health and higher somatic cell counts, indicating higher rates of infection.³¹ In other words, contrary to what Oakridge Dairy claims, the company uses a milking process that apparently exacerbates complications and compromises cows’ long-term health.

Additionally, the company absurdly claims that cows “spend their days relaxing among their peers”³² and that all of its facilities offer “the same level of comfort.”³³ In addition to the physical and psychological distress caused by the conditions at Oakridge Dairy, cows in the dairy industry are deprived from establishing meaningful social connections with other animals, including their own babies. Scientific studies have demonstrated that cows are social animals who enjoy playing and interacting with one another and have a strong desire to nurse their babies.³⁴ An Oakridge Dairy worker admitted on the eyewitness video that Oakridge Dairy separates cows from their babies within 20 minutes of birth. This practice causes great pain and stress to both the mother and the baby.³⁵ After separation, cows frequently search for their calves and bellow for hours, reflecting the deep emotional anguish they endure.³⁶ Aside from denying cows the opportunity to bond with their babies, this early separation has a profound impact on the calf’s social development.³⁷

In sum, Oakridge Dairy’s claims are demonstrably false and misleading and likely to deceive consumers. There is no reality in which cows confined to a concrete-floored mega-shed, denied all outdoor access, separated from their calves, strapped to milking machines several times a day, and finally slaughtered can be seen as receiving “an exceptional level of care”³⁸ according to “exceptional animal welfare standards.”³⁹ In reality, Oakridge Dairy’s intensive farming practices cause and exacerbate cows’ health issues—including painful conditions such as mastitis, swollen joints, sore feet, and skin abrasions—and

²⁶ Vogel (2024).

²⁷ Richardson (2024); Vogel (2024).

²⁸ *The Magic of Oakridge Dairy*, Oakridge Dairy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9H10HELcow/> (last visited Nov. 17, 2024).

²⁹ *Home*, The Modern Milkman, *supra* note 13.

³⁰ R. Paramasivam *et al.*, “Is AMR in Dairy Products a Threat to Human Health? An Updated Review on the Origin, Prevention, Treatment, and Economic Impacts of Subclinical Mastitis,” *Infection and Drug Resistance* (2023).

³¹ M. Hovinen *et al.*, “Invited Review: Udder Health of Dairy Cows in Automatic Milking,” *Journal of Dairy Science* (2011).

³² *Cows*, Oakridge Dairy, *supra* note 5.

³³ *Barns*, Oakridge Dairy, *supra* note 1.

³⁴ K. Wagner *et al.*, “Effects of mother versus artificial rearing during the first 12 weeks of life on challenge responses of dairy cows,” *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* (2015).

³⁵ Richardson (2024).

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Vogel (2024).

³⁸ *Milk*, Oakridge Dairy, *supra* note 1.

³⁹ *Id.*

deprive them of expressing natural behaviors, causing them great psychological and physical pain. Cows who suffer at Oakridge Dairy's farm are undoubtedly anything but "happy."

The Federal Trade Commission Act (FTC Act) prohibits unfair methods of competition, which include false and misleading advertising. 15 U.S.C. § 45. Connecticut law similarly prohibits "misrepresent[ing] the nature, characteristics..., or qualities of merchandise," Conn. Agencies Regs. § 42-110b-18(e), and further provides that "[a]n advertisement of a food...shall be deemed to be false, if it is false or misleading in any particular."

Accordingly, PETA looks forward to your confirmation by January 7, 2025, that you have removed these false and misleading claims from your website and other marketing materials. PETA hopes to resolve this issue with you before pursuing any additional legal action, including but not limited to complaints to the FTC and the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection for violations of the FTC Act and Connecticut state law respectively.

Respectfully,



Mary Maerz
Senior Counsel, PETA Foundation

