

Editor's Note: *The following comment was posted to the web site of Northwest Public Radio (NWPR, which serves communities in eastern Washington) in reaction to a news story broadcast by the station on Dec. 1, 2009 (a transcript of the story was posted to NWPR's web site with an invitation to listeners to offer comments). A few hours after it was posted, NWPR deleted the comment.*

We are amazed by the shocking lapses in accepted journalistic practice that are evident in Mary Hawkins' *Our Northwest Economy* story entitled "Spokane's Family Farm" (Dec. 1, 2009). Hawkins allowed Mike and Trish Vieira to spew a long catalog of baseless and absurd allegations against every dairy farming family in the state – except theirs – without any attempt to verify the accuracy of the information they presented. It would have been easy for Hawkins to have contacted a state agency like ours – or any of the Vieiras' fellow dairy farmers – for confirmation of the Vieiras' claims; had she done so, we could have warned her that the disparaging comments with which they insulted Washington's conscientious and hard-working dairy farming families lack any foundation in scientific fact. Any good reporter knows that it is inherently dangerous to base a story on a single source – but that's what Hawkins did. The result is not journalism but rather marketing spin – NWPR's contribution to an advertisement intended to frighten and confuse consumers and fool them into purchasing costlier dairy products from Spokane's Family Farm. We are disappointed that Washington State University – an institution that our industry annually endows with research grants to develop safer and more efficient means of producing dairy foods – would allow its associated public radio affiliate to participate in such an obvious marketing ploy. Hawkins' story isn't news – it's a sales pitch.

Blair Thompson
Director of Consumer Communications
Washington State Dairy Products Commission

Editor's Note: *The following comment was drafted in response to NWPR's airing of the "Spokane's Family Farm" story, but NWPR's web site stopped posting responses to the story before this one could be posted there.*

I listened to the interview and report on the radio website about the "Spokane Family Farm". I usually enjoy the farming interviews on NPR, but not this time. In these tough economic times, the report just made me feel bad; both the reporter and the farmer seemed to think the best way to portray the dairy industry was in a conflicted manner. All dairy farms in Washington have to meet the same requirements for a Grade A Permit to operate. They all must meet rigorous standards on milk quality and environmental protection, and they must pass regular state inspections to ensure the safety and quality of our milk supply. Innovations in pasteurization and packaging of dairy products have been done for the consumer's safety and convenience.

I would have felt better after this report if the farmer had simply let the reporter know they really wanted to produce a great local product for people to enjoy. These days it is very important for some people to know right where their food is coming from, how and when it was produced. It is also very important to other folks to know they have a safe product that has been properly handled and processed to meet their needs, which may include a variety of issues including availability, shelf life and price.

I think it is always better to produce a product that speaks for itself rather than disparaging another choice.

Gloria Edwards
Former Dairy Producer