Version:1.0 StartHTML:0000000193 EndHTML:0000002826 StartFragment:0000002452 EndFragment:0000002790 SourceURL:file://localhost/Volumes/SERVER/EDITORIAL/3-15-11/COLUMNS/barefootfarmer.doc @font-face { font-family: "Times New Roman"; }p.MsoNormal, li.MsoNormal, div.MsoNormal { margin: 0in 0in 0.0001pt; font-size: 12pt; font-family: "Times New Roman"; }table.MsoNormalTable { font-size: 10pt; font-family: "Times New Roman"; }div.Section1 { page: Section1; }

The people of Macon County are now deciding whether or not to be a “chicken house county.” A few still think that a couple hundred chicken houses are a good idea, and it’s usually obviously why. Some want the county to do an impact study, but driving through clay county makes that unnecessary, it stinks.

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A public meeting held on Feb. 24 drew 85 people despite severe storm warnings advising you to stay home. We watched a film clip, heard speakers, got a chance to talk and ate cookies. The last was my favorite part.

Food, Inc. was the name of the film. Here we meet a man driving by chicken houses saying “smells like money.” he wanted show the camera crew inside of his chicken houses, but was told not to by Tysons, who declined to be interviewed.

Another chicken house owner did let the crew in, and it’s not a pleasant sight. Thank goodness you can’t smell a movie. This person had become immune to antibiotics because of all the dust in the chicken house that had antibiotics in it.

A hidden camera showed how they harvest the chickens, which was done at 1:00 a.m. The workers are preferably illegal so they can’t complain about the horrible working conditions. Chicken houses are not farms, they are an industry and create very toxic waste, and severe social and economic problems.

A.T. Terry, an agricultural economist, spoke about his personal tragedy in the chicken house business. He bought property with houses on it for $385,000 in 2001, near Lynchburg, Tennessee. When the company wanted him to upgrade, he said he couldn't afford to.

That's hen things get ugly. They let you make money at first, but then you are at their mercy. Just read the Cobb-Vantress contract and you can see that the company can make you default if you do anything they don't like. He was forced out of his chicken house business and the property sold for less than $40,000.

Another chicken house farmer spoke about the economic loss he suffered until he finally had to quit. He thought chicken houses could be ran in a way that didn't pollute, but he said the contracts give way too much power to the company and leave the farmer helpless.

Everyone in the audience got a chance to voice their concerns. Well, not really, because time ran out. Folks are worried about property values, the smell the noise, the security measures, the damage to our county-funded roads, the loss of jobs as other businesses move elsewhere, the kind of workers chicken houses employ, the bankruptcy these farmers are threatened with, the pollution of Macon County steams, the arsenic, ammonia and phosphate poisons, the cancer and other diseases chicken houses cause, and the stigma of living in a neighborhood where you can't enjoy a backyard cookout with your family.

Cobb's phase I plan starts with 27, two-house facilities, so the hundreds of residents in rural Macon County that live near potential chicken house farms certainly have concerns. In an effort to offer a chance to express them another public meeting will be held on Thursday, March 17 at 6:00 p.m. at the Macon County Justice Center. Please plan to attend, and, if you want to, bring some cookies.