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NO COW LEFT BEHIND: A CAUTIONARY TALE

Alexandra Miletta and Katherine Morris

In green pastures across the heartland
Dairy farmers could tell with a glance
If their cows were unusually skinny
No prognosis was left up to chance

In time there were remedies
Recipes tested
Farmers were trained
New diets suggested

Despite some progress
The farmers were concerned
And did their best to uncover
What the cows had learned

About eating proper doses
And grazing in the field
So that they'd be healthy
Their stoutness revealed

Then the government issued a warning
"Our cows are underweight!
The ones in Europe and Asia
Get fat at a faster rate!"

Experts jumped into action
Dairy farmers were urged to comply
With new strict diet guidelines
And discouraged from questioning why

A law was passed to move things along
"No Cow Left Behind!" was its name
Norms were issue by age and weight
To ensure all cows' growth was the same

Food was measured in exact proportions
Cows must be fed in troughs and rows
Thus ignoring the farmers' wisdom
For how a scrawny cow grows

The law had another component
To measure the cows with precision
The scales must be digitally calibrated
To accomplish our fattened up vision

The farmers were told to get cows on those scales
Whether they liked it or not
And to measure the girth of their bellies
To gather the data they sought

The cows, reluctant and unhappy,
Attempted to stand on those scales
They ate the bland diet we fed them
But hated that stale hay in bales

They remembered the fresh grassy pastures
Where they used to munch and play
And longed for the freedom of choosing
How to spend a warm summer's day

Then one night at the dinner table
Two farm children wondered aloud,
"Why don't we feed our cows better food?
And not pack them into a crowd?"

We should let them run around
Enjoy the fresh air outside
They we'll see how those bellies
Begin to get really wide!"

So they tested their theory
Prepared tasty concoctions
With inventive ingredients
And culinary options

One day it was oatmeal
With wheatgrass and soy
Dinner was crunchier -
Roasted peanuts and bok choy

The cows on that farm
Just feasted for weeks
On exotic combinations
Like chocolate covered leeks

The children discovered
A foregone conclusion
The cows' weight loss crisis
Was just an illusion

The cows were depressed
Not too skinny or thin
A variety diet
Was the way to begin

To lift up their spirits
Give them lofty ambitions
The children painted cow portraits
In full color renditions

They sent them to Washington
With detailed description
But the question remains
Will the politicians listen?

Illustrations by Chiara Pasqualotto, 2004. See <http://www.clairepas.it> for more of this artist's work.

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