

# AZ Economy



## Is farm smell doing harm?

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USA TODAY NETWORK

A battle between Hickman's Egg Ranch and residents on the western edge of metro Phoenix is playing out in a flurry of lawsuits and regulatory agencies locally and nationally.

The millions of chickens at Hickman's industrial-sized farms in Arlington and Tonopah create dust, feathers, flies and a "sickening stink," residents and community groups contend in state and federal lawsuits. They say the release of ammonia and another gas affects their health, with symptoms including difficulty breathing and feeling nauseated after eating because of the stench in the air.

The giant egg producer filed a countersuit against 18 residents, a business owner and three community groups, contending that its farms are not a nuisance.

The egg operations fall within unincorporated Maricopa County, which adds a wrinkle. The Tonopah facility is in a district represented by County Supervisor Clint Hickman, who is a vice president of sales for the company.

The feathers have been flying since Hickman's expanded to Tonopah in 2014, in an area that was home to retirees, a small but established commercial strip with a family restaurant, an RV park and hot-water springs that attracted travelers.

Hickman's attorney says the residents close to live in an agricultural area, the egg farm is hardly the only source of odors and insects and its operations have no adverse effect on public health.

The company's stance will be put to the test as state and federal health agency officials have begun to investigate whether there are harmful levels of ammonia and hydrogen sulfide in the air near Hickman's.

Since 2015, hundreds of complaints about putrid odors and dusty haze lodged with

Tonopah residents filed lawsuits alleging health concerns, but Hickman's fired back saying its egg ranch wasn't a nuisance



Above: A sign tells Tonopah residents to not give up and continue to fight Hickman's Family Farms on Feb. 12.

Top: Linda and Mike Butler stand on the front porch of their home near Hickman's Family Farms in Tonopah on Feb. 12. Hickman's Tonopah farm houses over 4 million chickens, which the Butlers and others have said has created horrible smells in their town.

PHOTOS BY PATRICK BREEN/THE REPUBLIC

state and Maricopa County air quality agencies have resulted in no odor citations against Hickman's Tonopah and Arlington operations. But tenacious residents, who navigated the complex air-quality bureaucracy and often walked away saying the grievances fell on deaf ears, have captured the attention of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Officials from the Atlanta-based federal agency met with more than 100 residents on Tuesday to listen to what community residents had to say about the air-quality issue.

Mike Butler and his wife live in a quaint, Western-themed home about 2 miles from several million Hickman hens in Tonopah.

It's not the first time Butler has had the Hickman's hens as neighbors. Going back more than 60 years, his family and Nell Hickman — grandmother of the current Hickman's executives — lived in the same rural area of Glendale.

His parents had hauled their belongings from Fort Worth, Texas, to settle in a dry climate that would be better for their asthmatic 2-year-old boy, Butler said. On occasion, they would pull their Hudson Hornet off to the side of the road to buy eggs from Nell Hickman's back porch.

The entrepreneurial Nell Hickman started the egg ranch in 1944 at her Glendale home near 67th and Missouri avenues with just a few hens. She wanted to bring in extra money for her family. After a decade, she had 500 laying hens, and her son's family soon joined her enterprise. In 1971, the farm moved to a 40-acre lot on the western edge of Glendale, which at the time was unincorporated county land. By 1997, the operation had 350,000 laying hens.

"Hickman's was just a good family, they were trying to grow their business," said Butler, now 75.

While Butler was wrapping up his career

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## Disclosure rules add to rich-poor debate



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Corporate CEOs bear enormous control over and responsibility for their operations and employees — and sometimes even suppliers and customers. They're typically paid handsomely for assuming all that oversight and pressure.

But does that mean they should earn 100 times or even 1,000 times what employees typically make at the same com-

panies? CEO pay long has been a lightning rod in the rich-poor debate. That's partly because public corporations must disclose these numbers once a year in standardized tables, which makes for visible and easy comparisons. It's also because so many CEOs literally rake in millions of dollars.

Now comes a new wrinkle.

In a long-awaited requirement of the Dodd-Frank Act, public companies must report pay ratios showing how much their CEOs earn compared with the typical employee. The first such reports are rolling in and provide new in-

sight on pay gaps.

For example, the CEO of Fresh Del Monte Produce earned nearly 1,500 times the pay of the typical worker of the produce-packaging company in 2017, while the head of Apollo Global Management earned about the same as the typical employee at the investment-management company.

Does that make Del Monte CEO Mohammed Abu-Ghazaleh overpaid and his Apollo counterpart, Leon Black, underpaid? Not necessarily. As with other aspects of CEO compensation, a closer look often is required.

Step one in evaluating CEO pay is rec-

ognizing what the figures mean.

The pay of the CEO and a handful of a company's other top executives are listed once a year in annual proxy reports known as Schedule 14As, though they sometimes show up in other documents such as the annual report or 10K.

Public companies must disclose this information, and it's placed on a website of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. This website is commonly known as EDGAR, and it's found at: <https://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml>.

The SEC for years has required com-

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