



IOWA CHAPTER

Local Control for Siting CAFOs Is Fair for Rural Communities

Rural residents have been stripped of the right to determine appropriate locations to site concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), industrial-scale animal buildings. Counties and communities are allowed to zone the locations for factories and other industries, but they are not allowed the same authorities for the CAFO industry. Yet a CAFO has a significant effect on the neighbors' quality of life, including stench, degraded water quality and health problems resulting from air emissions and antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

In Iowa, zoning regulations are determined by municipal and county ordinances; there are some guidelines set at the state level. Zoning regulations define land use, such as transportation, housing, manufacturing and industry, and commercial uses. There are three sets of documents involved in zoning:

1. the comprehensive plan which sets out the vision
2. the zoning regulations which lay out the zoning designations and activities allowed for each designation
3. the land use map, or zoning map, which lays out the county or municipality and its zoning designation



Photo by Bob Nichols, USDA NRCS

Current state law does not allow city and county zoning regulations to establish zoning designations, permitted uses and zoning maps for industrial livestock factories.¹

Smart planning attracts economic development in an area that is compatible with its present use while preserving the natural areas and character of the community. The results are livable communities and communities where people want to visit.

When a comprehensive plan and a land use map are created, the community, as a whole, knows what is expected and planned for an area. Citizens make plans for their residences based on how

¹ Industrial livestock factories are otherwise known as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) or factory farms.

a neighborhood is zoned. Companies make decisions for their businesses based on the zoning of an area.

Exempting an entire industry from zoning has consequences on the whole area. No one living in an area can predict where an industrial livestock factory, its manure application fields and its holding tanks for manure will be sited.

Why zoning should include industrial livestock factories

Industrial livestock factories clearly are not the idyllic picture of farming you might imagine, where animals are outside grazing on pasture and the farmer gets to know his animals and lovingly cares for them. And these are not the small-scale family farms where a few animals are raised sustainably. These are definitely not the types of farms that one would see in the Iowa countryside during the 1950s or 1960s.

These industrial livestock factories are large-scale operations of animals housed in buildings or confined in open feedlots. Alternatively, thousands of animals, particularly beef cattle, are raised in open feedlots that are pens with no grass growing. In the case of confinement buildings, the animals never go outside and never see sunlight from the time they are placed in the building until the time they are removed and transported to the slaughterhouse. In the case of pigs, the piglets are born inside of one enclosed building and later are transferred to another building, never being outside or seeing sunlight until they are transported to the finishing buildings.

Although there are buildings in Iowa that house 7,000 pigs, many house 2,499 pigs or fewer since that number places the confinement structure below a number of regulatory thresholds. Some buildings house several hundred thousand chickens at one time. Similar buildings are used to raise dairy cattle and turkeys.

Given that a pig generates as much pollution as five human beings, a structure holding 7,000 pigs generates the equivalent pollution as 35,000 people and a building holding 2,499 pigs generates the equivalent manure of 12,495 people. The manure is stored in open-air holding tanks or pits under the buildings until it can be emptied in the spring or fall, although most of the manure receptacles are emptied only in the fall. In the case of hog manure, it is stored in liquid form until it can be knifed into the ground. Poultry manure is stored in a dry form. None of the manure is treated, as is required of municipal sewage.

The neighbors complain of stench emanating from the production areas (buildings, manure receptacles). The stench from the operations prohibit the neighbors from hanging laundry out



Photo by Bob Nichols, USDA NRCS

to dry, from sitting, enjoying picnics or recreating in their own yards. Physical symptoms suffered by the neighbors include watery eyes, sore throats, trouble breathing and nausea. These symptoms result from hydrogen sulfide, methane, ammonia and fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). Once the manure is applied on the manure application fields, the neighbors complain that the stench emanating from the fields lasts for weeks. Neighbors of CAFOs report hearing pigs squealing constantly, around-the-clock, disturbing sleep, interrupting the peace and quiet within their homes.

Yet, once a CAFO is built, it does not matter what the comprehensive plans and land use maps intend for the area and the manure application fields. No one wants to build a house next to the manure application fields or the CAFO production areas. Most businesses, including hotels, restaurants, office buildings and recreation facilities, do not want to be located next to a CAFO operation.



Photo by Bob Nichols, USDA NRCS

Once a landowner decides to build a CAFO, there is little that can prevent it and few ways to deal with the after affects once the CAFO has been built, including the stench, toxic air releases and constant squealing once the set-back distances are met. The Board of Supervisors has little authority over the placement or size of the CAFO. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources can do little about the placement or size, except to ensure that what regulation is in place is followed. Those regulations are clearly designed to favor the CAFO and not the neighbors. The neighbors are excluded from planning and have little that can be done on their behalf in authorizing the siting.

Local control and zoning

Local control of the zoning and siting of industrial livestock factories is necessary.

Industrial livestock factories should be subjected to local zoning regulations. No other large-scale factory or industry is exempted in those locales that have implemented the zoning regulations. Concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) need to be subject to planning and zoning activities, from planning to implementation of the zoning regulations, to actual development of the property. County comprehensive plans need to be allowed to consider and plan for CAFOs. County zoning maps need to be able to locate CAFOs to appropriate areas in the county.

Clearly some land uses are more compatible being contiguous to each other, while some uses are not compatible. Generally, industrial uses of land are not sited next to churches, schools and residences. Likewise, municipal sewage treatment plants are not sited next to housing. For the same reasons, industrial livestock factories, manure application fields and manure receptacles need to be appropriately sited. That is what zoning is all about.

Planning and zoning commissions need to be able to consider the siting of CAFOs.