

CAFO Moratorium Questions and Answers

We have so many animals living in the state that the land cannot hold all of the manure that is excreted. In the process of feeding the world, Iowa farmers are dumping the world's manure into our rivers, streams, and lakes. Now, the manure is not directly piped into the river, it is first applied to farm fields. There is so much manure placed on the farm fields that the crops cannot absorb it all. So it runs off the fields, often through tile lines, and into our waterbodies. Once it is in the waterbodies, it is a pollutant. Our waterbodies have become sewers for untreated CAFO (confined animal feeding operation, otherwise called a factory farm) manure.

Why is a moratorium needed?

Since Iowa farmland can no longer handle the amount of manure being produced, it is time to stop adding more animals to the state. We have hit the saturation point. It is time to put the controls in place, to clean up Iowa's waters, and to enforce the laws so that our waters are not polluted. That is why it is time to stop building more confinements and to stop expanding existing confinements.

Let's look at what happens when a factory is manufacturing widgets and has more widgets in the warehouse than it is able to sell. The factory stops manufacturing for a while. Likewise, if a store has purchased more product than it is able to sell, the store stops purchasing more.



And when our waters are so polluted from manure that they are on the impaired waters list, when our beaches become unusable due to bacteria and toxins resulting from the manure in the water, when our drinking water is put at risk from nitrates, it time to stop adding more CAFOs and more manure.

Would it help to give the neighbors more say in the siting of CAFOs?

The siting of CAFOs has become a state-wide issue, affecting Iowans across the state. Iowa's rivers, streams, and lakes are severely polluted with nitrogen and fertilizer. Some areas of the state are more polluted than others. This is a bigger issue than just the neighbors of the CAFOs. It affects folks living many miles from the confinements.

Local control would help in some cases, where CAFOs are sited in areas that clearly are not suitable to the area. However, most of the remaining areas in Iowa where the CAFO industry has not already built confinements are those areas that have great impact to neighboring communities and families.

The livestock industry has always pushed the narrative that if the neighbors can be placated with odor reduction, the industry can go on polluting. The issue is the over-application of manure on farmland. Siting of CAFOs to satisfy neighbors will not solve that problem, especially since the CAFO industry will look for some other place if they get resistance from the neighbors.

This is a systemic problem – there are too many confinements, too many animals, and too much manure for the land to handle the manure. That is why it is time to stop building more confinements.

If the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will not satisfactorily regulate CAFOs, should the regulatory responsibility be moved to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship?

That would be like the fox guarding the henhouse. The Iowa Department of Agriculture (IDALS) has a key role in advancing farming issues in the state. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) does not represent constituencies, such as the agriculture community. Moving the regulatory functions to the Agriculture Department would put the chief advocate for agriculture in the role of enforcing environmental laws.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has delegated the administration of the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act to Iowa. The Department of Natural Resources has staff on board who have expertise in water, air, landfills, solid waste, and all kinds of environmental issues.

The DNR director, DNR staff, and its oversight board the Environmental Protection Commission are not elected. The Secretary of Agriculture is elected and accountable to the people. Shouldn't an elected official be in charge of regulating air quality and water quality?

The Director of the Department of Natural Resources reports to the governor. The DNR Director is a political appointee. So the DNR Director is indirectly accountable to the people, through the governor.

The Environmental Protection Commission by law is also appointed by the governor. The problem is that a majority of the Commissioners are designated to come from certain backgrounds: farming, finance or commerce, and manufacturing. They have a clear conflict of interest. But the right governor could still choose good commissioners.

As stated above, the Secretary of Agriculture sees the responsibilities of that position as promoting agriculture rather than regulating it.

Wouldn't fixing the Matrix help?

The problems with the Matrix are huge, and they are beyond simple repairs. Most confinements are built so that they can avoid using the Matrix and its approval process. The process moves too quickly from the Board of Supervisors to the approval by the Department of Natural Resources, leaving little time for public review, input, and oversight. Furthermore, the neighbors and the general public are not allowed to be parties to the review before the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) even though they are the ones suffering from the side-effects of the confinement. A bias exists in the process that supports approving the permit. The Supervisors have very little input and can only make a recommendation to DNR about a confinement, very little time to gather their information, and cannot restrict areas in their counties where confinements can be sited. The points are self-scored by the owner of the confinement. The set-backs from neighbors are not adequate.

What you can do

Contact your state legislators and Iowa's Governor and ask for a moratorium on building new and expanding existing confined animal feeding operations. The industrial methods of raising animals in Iowa is not good for folks living near the CAFOs, not good for the environment, and not good for local communities.

A majority of Iowans favor a moratorium. Polling conducted in October, 2019, shows that a majority of Iowans favor banning construction of new CAFOs and expansion of existing CAFOs. Among the findings of the "National Survey on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)" are:¹

- 63% of Iowans think the state legislature should pass a ban on constructing new CAFOs or expanding existing CAFOs.
- Three-fourths of Iowans want to raise environmental standards for CAFOs to protect air quality and water quality and to safeguard neighboring communities.
- 56% of Iowans say industrial animal farms focus more on profits than public health.
- One-third of Iowans are worried about health impacts across the board.
- 80% of Iowans are concerned about the threat of contaminated water and air to CAFO workers and nearby communities.
- 51% believe that industrial hog and swine farms contribute a significant amount to water pollution in the area.
- 49% believe that industrial hog and swine farms contribute a significant amount to air pollution in the area.

¹ National Survey on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)" was released by Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, December 10, 2019

And "Survey: Majority of Voters Surveyed Support Greater Oversight of Industrial Animal Farms", press release from Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, December 10, 2019