Report Card for CAFOs: An Industry That Has Failed

How is the concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) industry doing?

- Manure spills and fish kills continue. Voluntary compliance with regulations has failed; it has resulted in no compliance.
- Iowa has 608 impaired waters with 818 impairments, the majority of which can be directly attributed to CAFOs. To date, no efforts have been made to clean up those waters. Although the CAFO industry advocates for voluntary compliance, CAFO owners make no voluntarily efforts to clean the water bodies but rather continue to apply concentrated animal manure to fields that results in runoff polluting our waters.
- Manure handling in CAFOs generates significant odors and toxic gases. Few biofilters have been installed on CAFOs in Iowa, even though research has found that biofilters will filter out 80 percent to 90 percent of the odors and toxic gases generated by CAFOs. As a result, the intense stench and poor air quality leave neighbors forced to stay inside their homes, constantly running air purifiers, and unable to keep windows open or dry laundry outside.
- Some CAFO operators still apply manure via spray guns and there is no apparent effort to voluntarily use a more modern method to land apply manure. Routinely knifing manure into the ground would be much more acceptable than spraying.
- The CAFO industry continues to resist any regulation, asking for more studies even though numerous studies have already been conducted (such as odor studies), denying the existence of problems, lobbying for exemptions from laws, and asking for long delays before they have to comply (such as prohibitions on the application of manure on soybeans) or litigate rules they don’t like in order to delay compliance.

Grade for CAFO industry: F

The public wants... 

- Clean water and live fish in Iowa’s streams. The Clean Water Act does not sufficiently address non-point source pollution (NPS), the majority of which comes from CAFO discharges. Strong NPS rules need be adopted to properly regulate CAFO discharges.
- Clean air. Clean air is a basic human right. Odor from CAFOs needs to be controlled and reduced. Emissions of harmful substances, such as ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and particulate matter, must be decreased.
- Healthy and sustainable rural economy. The federal Packers and Stockyards laws need to be enforced, returning competition to the livestock industry and providing farmers who do not raise animals in CAFOs a channel to sell and market their livestock.
- Reduce the use of antibiotics in animals so that antibiotics are only used to treat illnesses and are not used to spur growth in animals or for sub-therapeutic purposes.

For more information, see http://www.sierraclub.org/iowa/sustainable-agriculture