

# Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



**N A L B O H**

National Association of Local Boards of Health

# **Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities**

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## Foreword

The National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH) is pleased to provide *Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities* to assist local boards of health who have concerns about concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) or large industrial animal farms in their communities. The Environmental Health Services Branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) encouraged the development of this product and provided technical oversight and financial support. This publication was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 5U38HM000512. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.

The mission of NALBOH is to strengthen boards of health, enabling them to promote and protect the health of their communities, through education, technical assistance, and advocacy. Boards of health are responsible for fulfilling three public health core functions: assessment, policy development, and assurance. For a health agency, this includes overseeing and ensuring that there are sufficient resources, effective policies and procedures, partnerships with other organizations and agencies, and regular evaluation of an agency's services.

NALBOH is confident that *Understanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and Their Impact on Communities* will help local board of health members understand their role in developing ways to mitigate potential problems associated with CAFOs. We trust that the information provided in this guide will enable board of health members to develop and sustain monitoring programs, investigate developing policy related to CAFOs, and create partnerships with other local and state agencies and officials to improve the health and well-being of communities everywhere.

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## Introduction

Livestock farming has undergone a significant transformation in the past few decades. Production has shifted from smaller, family-owned farms to large farms that often have corporate contracts. Most meat and dairy products now are produced on large farms with single species buildings or open-air pens (MacDonald & McBride, 2009). Modern farms have also become much more efficient. Since 1960, milk production has doubled, meat production has tripled, and egg production has quadrupled (Pew Commission on Industrial Animal Farm Production, 2009). Improvements to animal breeding, mechanical innovations, and the introduction of specially formulated feeds and animal pharmaceuticals have all increased the efficiency and productivity of animal agriculture. It also takes much less time to raise a fully grown animal. For example, in 1920, a chicken took approximately 16 weeks to reach 2.2 lbs., whereas now they can reach 5 lbs. in 7 weeks (Pew, 2009).

New technologies have allowed farmers to reduce costs, which mean bigger profits on less land and capital. The current agricultural system rewards larger farms with lower costs, which results in greater profit and more incentive to increase farm size.

### AFO vs. CAFO

A CAFO is a specific type of large-scale industrial agricultural facility that raises animals, usually at high-density, for the consumption of meat, eggs, or milk. To be considered a CAFO, a farm must first be categorized as an animal feeding operation (AFO). An AFO is a lot or facility where animals are kept confined and fed or maintained for 45 or more days per year, and crops, vegetation, or forage growth are not sustained over a normal growing period (Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2009). CAFOs are classified by the type and number of animals they contain, and the way they discharge waste into the water supply. CAFOs are AFOs that contain at least a certain number of animals, or have a number of animals that fall within a range and have waste materials that come into contact with the water supply. This contact can either be through a pipe that carries manure or wastewater to surface water, or by animal contact with surface water that runs through their confined area. (See Appendix A)

### History

AFOs were first identified as potential pollutants in the 1972 Clean Water Act. Section 502 identified “feedlots” as “point sources” for pollution along with other industries, such as fertilizer manufacturing. Consequently, a permit program entitled the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) was created which set effluent limitation guidelines and standards (ELGs) for CAFOs. CAFOs have since been regulated by NPDES or a state equivalent since the mid-1970s. The definitions of what was considered an AFO or CAFO were created by the EPA for the NPDES process in 1976. These regulations remained in effect for more than 25 years, but increases and changes to farm size and production methods required an update to the permit system.

The regulations guiding CAFO permits and operations were revised in 2003. New inclusions in the 2003 regulations were that all CAFOs had to apply for a NPDES permit even if they only discharged in the event of a large storm. Large poultry operations were included in the regulations, regardless of their waste disposal system, and all CAFOs that held a NPDES permit were required to develop and implement a nutrient management plan. These plans had CAFOs identify ways to treat or process waste in a way that maintained nutrient levels at the appropriate amount.

The 2003 CAFO rule was subsequently challenged in court. A Second Circuit Court of Appeals decision required alteration to the CAFO permitting system. In *Water Keeper et al. vs. the EPA*, the court directed the EPA to remove the requirement for all CAFOs to apply for NPDES. Instead, the court required that nutrient management plans be submitted with the permit application, reviewed by officials and the public, and the terms of the plan be incorporated into the permit.

As a result of this court decision, the CAFO rule was again updated. The current final CAFO rule, which was revised in 2008, requires that only CAFOs which discharge or propose to discharge waste apply for permits. The EPA has also provided clarification in the discussion surrounding the rule on how CAFOs should assess whether they discharge or propose to discharge. There is also the opportunity to receive a no discharge certification for CAFOs that do not discharge or propose to discharge. This certification demonstrates that the CAFO is not required to acquire a permit. And while CAFOs were required to create nutrient management plans under the 2003 rule, these plans were now included with permit applications, and had a built-in time period for public review and comment.

### **Benefits of CAFOs**

When properly managed, located, and monitored, CAFOs can provide a low-cost source of meat, milk, and eggs, due to efficient feeding and housing of animals, increased facility size, and animal specialization. When CAFOs are proposed in a local area, it is usually argued that they will enhance the local economy and increase employment. The effects of using local materials, feed, and livestock are argued to ripple throughout the economy, and increased tax expenditures will lead to increase funds for schools and infrastructure.

### **Environmental Health Effects**

The most pressing public health issue associated with CAFOs stems from the amount of manure they produce. CAFO manure contains a variety of potential contaminants. It can contain plant nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, pathogens such as *E. coli*, growth hormones, antibiotics, chemicals used as additives to the manure or to clean equipment, animal blood, silage leachate from corn feed, or copper sulfate used in footbaths for cows.

Depending on the type and number of animals in the farm, manure production can range between 2,800 tons and 1.6 million tons a year (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2008). Large farms can produce more waste than some U.S. cities—a feeding operation with 800,000 pigs could produce over 1.6 million tons of waste a year. That amount is one and a half times more than the annual sanitary waste produced by the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (GAO, 2008). Annually, it is estimated that livestock animals in the U.S. produce each year somewhere between 3 and 20 times more manure than people in the U.S. produce, or as much as 1.2–1.37 billion tons of waste (EPA, 2005). Though sewage treatment plants are required for human waste, no such treatment facility exists for livestock waste.

While manure is valuable to the farming industry, in quantities this large it becomes problematic. Many farms no longer grow their own feed, so they cannot use all the manure they produce as fertilizer. CAFOs must find a way to manage the amount of manure produced by their animals. Ground application of untreated manure is one of the most common disposal methods due to its low cost. It has limitations, however, such as the inability to apply manure while the ground is frozen. There are also limits as to how many nutrients from manure a land area can handle. Over application of livestock wastes can overload

soil with macronutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous and micronutrients that have been added to animal feed like heavy metals (Burkholder et al., 2007). Other manure management strategies include pumping liquefied manure onto spray fields, trucking it off-site, or storing it until it can be used or treated. Manure can be stored in deep pits under the buildings that hold animals, in clay or concrete pits, treatment lagoons, or holding ponds.

Animal feeding operations are developing in close proximity in some states, and fields where manure is applied have become clustered. When manure is applied too frequently or in too large a quantity to an area, nutrients overwhelm the absorptive capacity of the soil, and either run off or are leached into the groundwater. Storage units can break or become faulty, or rainwater can cause holding lagoons to overflow. While CAFOs are required to have permits that limit the levels of manure discharge, handling the large amounts of manure inevitably causes accidental releases which have the ability to potentially impact humans.

The increased clustering and growth of CAFOs has led to growing environmental problems in many communities. The excess production of manure and problems with storage or manure management can affect ground and surface water quality. Emissions from degrading manure and livestock digestive processes produce air pollutants that often affect ambient air quality in communities surrounding CAFOs. CAFOs can also be the source of greenhouse gases, which contribute to global climate change.

All of the environmental problems with CAFOs have direct impact on human health and welfare for communities that contain large industrial farms. As the following sections demonstrate, human health can suffer because of contaminated air and degraded water quality, or from diseases spread from farms. Quality of life can suffer because of odors or insect vectors surrounding farms, and property values can drop, affecting the financial stability of a community. One study found that 82.8% of those living near and 89.5% of those living far from CAFOs believed that their property values decreased, and 92.2% of those living near and 78.9% of those living far from CAFOs believed the odor from manure was a problem. The study found that real estate values had not dropped and odor infestations were not validated by local governmental staff in the areas. However, the concerns show that CAFOs remain contentious in communities (Schmalzried and Fallon, 2007). CAFOs are an excellent example of how environmental problems can directly impact human and community well-being.

## **Groundwater**

Groundwater can be contaminated by CAFOs through runoff from land application of manure, leaching from manure that has been improperly spread on land, or through leaks or breaks in storage or containment units. The EPA's 2000 National Water Quality Inventory found that 29 states specifically identified animal feeding operations, not just concentrated animal feeding operations, as contributing to water quality impairment (Congressional Research Service, 2008). A study of private water wells in Idaho detected levels of veterinary antibiotics, as well as elevated levels of nitrates (Batt, Snow, & Alga, 2006). Groundwater is a major source of drinking water in the United States. The EPA estimates that 53% of the population relies on groundwater for drinking water, often at much higher rates in rural areas (EPA, 2004). Unlike surface water, groundwater contamination sources are more difficult to monitor. The extent and source of contamination are often harder to pinpoint in groundwater than surface water contamination. Regular testing of household water wells for total and fecal coliform bacteria is a crucial element in monitoring groundwater quality, and can be the first step in discovering contamination issues related to CAFO discharge. Groundwater contamination can also affect surface water (Spellman &

Whiting, 2007). Contaminated groundwater can move laterally and eventually enter surface water, such as rivers or streams.

When groundwater is contaminated by pathogenic organisms, a serious threat to drinking water can occur. Pathogens survive longer in groundwater than surface water due to lower temperatures and protection from the sun. Even if the contamination appears to be a single episode, viruses could become attached to sediment near groundwater and continue to leach slowly into groundwater. One pollution event by a CAFO could become a lingering source of viral contamination for groundwater (EPA, 2005).

Groundwater can still be at risk for contamination after a CAFO has closed and its lagoons are empty. When given increased air exposure, ammonia in soil transforms into nitrates. Nitrates are highly mobile in soil, and will reach groundwater quicker than ammonia. It can be dangerous to ignore contaminated soil. The amount of pollution found in groundwater after contamination depends on the proximity of the aquifer to the CAFO, the size of the CAFO, whether storage units or pits are lined, the type of subsoil, and the depth of the groundwater.

If a CAFO has contaminated a water system, community members should be concerned about nitrates and nitrate poisoning. Elevated nitrates in drinking water can be especially harmful to infants, leading to blue baby syndrome and possible death. Nitrates oxidize iron in hemoglobin in red blood cells to methemoglobin. Most people convert methemoglobin back to hemoglobin fairly quickly, but infants do not convert back as fast. This hinders the ability of the infant's blood to carry oxygen, leading to a blue or purple appearance in affected infants. However, infants are not the only ones who can be affected by excess nitrates in water. Low blood oxygen in adults can lead to birth defects, miscarriages, and poor general health. Nitrates have also been speculated to be linked to higher rates of stomach and esophageal cancer (Bowman, Mueller, & Smith, 2000). In general, private water wells are at higher risk of nitrate contamination than public water supplies.

## **Surface Water**

The agriculture sector, including CAFOs, is the leading contributor of pollutants to lakes, rivers, and reservoirs. It has been found that states with high concentrations of CAFOs experience on average 20 to 30 serious water quality problems per year as a result of manure management problems (EPA, 2001). This pollution can be caused by surface discharges or other types of discharges. Surface discharges can be caused by heavy storms or floods that cause storage lagoons to overflow, running off into nearby bodies of water. Pollutants can also travel over land or through surface drainage systems to nearby bodies of water, be discharged through manmade ditches or flushing systems found in CAFOs, or come into contact with surface water that passes directly through the farming area. Soil erosion can contribute to water pollution, as some pollutants can bond to eroded soil and travel to watersheds (EPA, 2001). Other types of discharges occur when pollutants travel to surface water through other mediums, such as groundwater or air.

Contamination in surface water can cause nitrates and other nutrients to build up. Ammonia is often found in surface waters surrounding CAFOs. Ammonia causes oxygen depletion from water, which itself can kill aquatic life. Ammonia also converts into nitrates, which can cause nutrient overloads in surface waters (EPA, 1998). Excessive nutrient concentrations, such as nitrogen or phosphorus, can lead to eutrophication and make water uninhabitable to fish or indigenous aquatic life (Sierra Club Michigan Chapter, n.d.). Nutrient over-enrichment causes algal blooms, or a rapid increase of algae growth in an aquatic environment (Science Daily, n.d.). Algal blooms can cause a spiral of environmental problems to an aquatic system. Large groups of algae can block sunlight from underwater plant life, which are

habitats for much aquatic life. When algae growth increases in surface water, it can also dominate other resources and cause plants to die. The dead plants provide fuel for bacteria to grow and increased bacteria use more of the water's oxygen supply. Oxygen depletion once again causes indigenous aquatic life to die. Some algal blooms can contain toxic algae and other microorganisms, including *Pfiesteria*, which has caused large fish kills in North Carolina, Maryland, and the Chesapeake Bay area (Spellman & Whiting, 2007). Eutrophication can cause serious problems in surface waters and disrupt the ecological balance.

Water tests have also uncovered hormones in surface waters around CAFOs (Burkholder et al., 2007). Studies show that these hormones alter the reproductive habits of aquatic species living in these waters, including a significant decrease in the fertility of female fish. CAFO runoff can also lead to the presence of fecal bacteria or pathogens in surface water. One study showed that protozoa such as *Cryptosporidium parvum* and *Giardia* were found in over 80% of surface water sites tested (Spellman & Whiting, 2007). Fecal bacteria pollution in water from manure land application is also responsible for many beach closures and shellfish restrictions.

### **Air Quality**

In addition to polluting ground and surface water, CAFOs also contribute to the reduction of air quality in areas surrounding industrial farms. Animal feeding operations produce several types of air emissions, including gaseous and particulate substances, and CAFOs produce even more emissions due to their size. The primary cause of gaseous emissions is the decomposition of animal manure, while particulate substances are caused by the movement of animals. The type, amount, and rate of emissions created depends on what state the manure is in (solid, slurry, or liquid), and how it is treated or contained after it is excreted. Sometimes manure is “stabilized” in anaerobic lagoons, which reduces volatile solids and controls odor before land application.

The most typical pollutants found in air surrounding CAFOs are ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, methane, and particulate matter, all of which have varying human health risks. Table 1 on page 6 provides information on these pollutants.

Most manure produced by CAFOs is applied to land eventually and this land application can result in air emissions (Merkel, 2002). The primary cause of emission through land application is the volatilization of ammonia when the manure is applied to land. However, nitrous oxide is also created when nitrogen that has been applied to land undergoes nitrification and denitrification. Emissions caused by land application occur in two phases: one immediately following land application and one that occurs later and over a longer period as substances in the soil break down. Land application is not the only way CAFOs can emit harmful air emissions—ventilation systems in CAFO buildings can also release dangerous contaminants. A study by Iowa State University, which was a result of a lawsuit settlement between the Sierra Club and Tyson Chicken, found that two chicken houses in western Kentucky emitted over 10 tons of ammonia in the year they were monitored (Burns et al., 2007).

Most studies that examine the health effects of CAFO air emissions focus on farm workers, however some have studied the effect on area schools and children. While all community members are at risk from lowered air quality, children take in 20-50% more air than adults, making them more susceptible to lung disease and health effects (Kleinman, 2000). Researchers in North Carolina found that the closer children live to a CAFO, the greater the risk of asthma symptoms (Barrett, 2006). Of the 226 schools that were included in the study, 26% stated that there were noticeable odors from CAFOs outdoors, while 8% stated

**Table 1** Typical pollutants found in air surrounding CAFOs.

CAFO Emissions	Source	Traits	Health Risks
Ammonia	Formed when microbes decompose undigested organic nitrogen compounds in manure	Colorless, sharp pungent odor	Respiratory irritant, chemical burns to the respiratory tract, skin, and eyes, severe cough, chronic lung disease
Hydrogen Sulfide	Anaerobic bacterial decomposition of protein and other sulfur containing organic matter	Odor of rotten eggs	Inflammation of the moist membranes of eye and respiratory tract, olfactory neuron loss, death
Methane	Microbial degradation of organic matter under anaerobic conditions	Colorless, odorless, highly flammable	No health risks. Is a greenhouse gas and contributes to climate change.
Particulate Matter	Feed, bedding materials, dry manure, unpaved soil surfaces, animal dander, poultry feathers	Comprised of fecal matter, feed materials, pollen, bacteria, fungi, skin cells, silicates	Chronic bronchitis, chronic respiratory symptoms, declines in lung function, organic dust toxic syndrome

they experience odors from CAFOs inside the schools. Schools that were closer to CAFOs were often attended by students of lower socioeconomic status (Mirabelli, Wing, Marshall, & Wilcosky, 2006).

There is consistent evidence suggesting that factory farms increase asthma in neighboring communities, as indicated by children having higher rates of asthma (Sigurdarson & Kline, 2006; Mirabelli et al., 2006). CAFOs emit particulate matter and suspended dust, which is linked to asthma and bronchitis. Smaller particles can actually be absorbed by the body and can have systemic effects, including cardiac arrest. If people are exposed to particulate matter over a long time, it can lead to decreased lung function (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality [MDEQ] Toxics Steering Group [TSG], 2006). CAFOs also emit ammonia, which is rapidly absorbed by the upper airways in the body. This can cause severe coughing and mucous build-up, and if severe enough, scarring of the airways. Particulate matter may lead to more severe health consequences for those exposed by their occupation. Farm workers can develop acute and chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive airways disease, and interstitial lung disease. Repeated exposure to CAFO emissions can increase the likelihood of respiratory diseases. Occupational asthma, acute and chronic bronchitis, and organic dust toxic syndrome can be as high as 30% in factory farm workers

(Horrigan, Lawrence, & Walker, 2002). Other health effects of CAFO air emissions can be headaches, respiratory problems, eye irritation, nausea, weakness, and chest tightness.

There is evidence that CAFOs affect the ambient air quality of a community. There are three laws that potentially govern CAFO air emissions—the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA, also known as the Superfund Act), the Emergency Planning & Community Right to Know Act (EPCRA), and the Clean Air Act (CAA). However, the EPA passed a rule that exempts all CAFOs from reporting emissions under CERCLA. Only CAFOs that are classified as large are required to report any emission event of 100 pounds of ammonia or hydrogen sulfide or more during a 24-hour period locally or to the state under EPCRA (Michigan State University Extension, n.d.). The EPA has also instituted a voluntary Air Quality Compliance Agreement in which they will monitor some CAFO air emissions, and will not sue offenders but instead charge a small civil penalty. These changes have attracted criticism from environmental and community leaders who state that the EPA has yielded to influence from the livestock industry. The changes also leave ambiguity as to whether emission standards and air quality near CAFOs are being monitored.

### **Greenhouse Gas and Climate Change**

Aside from the possibility of lowering air quality in the areas around them, CAFOs also emit greenhouse gases, and therefore contribute to climate change. Globally, livestock operations are responsible for approximately 18% of greenhouse gas production and over 7% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions (Massey & Ulmer, 2008). While carbon dioxide is often considered the primary greenhouse gas of concern, manure emits methane and nitrous oxide which are 23 and 300 times more potent as greenhouse gases than carbon dioxide, respectively. The EPA attributes manure management as the fourth leading source of nitrous oxide emissions and the fifth leading source of methane emissions (EPA, 2009).

The type of manure storage system used contributes to the production of greenhouse gases. Many CAFOs store their excess manure in lagoons or pits, where they break down anaerobically (in the absence of oxygen), which exacerbates methane production. Manure that is applied to land or soil has more exposure to oxygen and therefore does not produce as much methane. Ruminant livestock, such as cows, sheep, or goats, also contribute to methane production through their digestive processes. These livestock have a special stomach called a rumen that allows them to digest tough grains or plants that would otherwise be unusable. It is during this process, called enteric fermentation, that methane is produced. The U.S. cattle industry is one of the primary methane producers. Livestock production and meat and dairy consumption has been increasing in the United States, so it can only be assumed that these greenhouse gas emissions will also rise and continue to contribute to climate change.

### **Odors**

One of the most common complaints associated with CAFOs are the odors produced. The odors that CAFOs emit are a complex mixture of ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and carbon dioxide, as well as volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds (Heederik et al., 2007). These odors are worse than smells formerly associated with smaller livestock farms. The anaerobic reaction that occurs when manure is stored in pits or lagoons for long amounts of time is the primary cause of the smells. Odors from waste are carried away from farm areas on dust and other air particles. Depending on things like weather conditions and farming techniques, CAFO odors can be smelled from as much as 5 or 6 miles away, although 3 miles is a more common distance (State Environmental Resource Center, 2004).

Because CAFOs typically produce malodors, many communities want to monitor emissions and odors. Quantifying odor from industrial farming can be challenging because it is a mixture of free and particle-bound compounds, which can make it hard to identify what specifically is causing the odor. Collecting data on specific gases, such as hydrogen sulfide, can be used as a proxy for odor levels.

CAFO odors can cause severe lifestyle changes for individuals in the surrounding communities and can alter many daily activities. When odors are severe, people may choose to keep their windows closed, even in high temperatures when there is no air conditioning. People also may choose to not let their children play outside and may even keep them home from school. Mental health deterioration and an increased sensitization to smells can also result from living in close proximity to odors from CAFOs. Odor can cause negative mood states, such as tension, depression, or anger, and possibly neuropsychiatric abnormalities, such as impaired balance or memory. People who live close to factory farms can develop CAFO-related post traumatic stress disorder, including anxiety about declining quality of life (Donham et al., 2007).

Ten states use direct regulations to control odors emitted by CAFOs. They prohibit odor emissions greater than a set standard. States with direct regulations use scentometers, which measure how many times an odor has to be doused with clean air before the smell is undetectable. An additional 34 states have indirect methods to reduce CAFO odors. These include: setbacks, which specify how far CAFO structures have to be from other buildings; permits, which are the most typical way of regulating CAFOs; public comment or involvement periods; and operator or manure placement training.

### **Insect Vectors**

CAFOs and their waste can be breeding grounds for insect vectors. Houseflies, stable flies, and mosquitoes are the most common insects associated with CAFOs. Houseflies breed in manure, while stable and other flies breed in decaying organic material, such as livestock bedding. Mosquitoes breed in standing water, and water on the edges of manure lagoons can cause mosquito infestations to rise. Flies can change from eggs to adults in only 10 days, which means that substances in which flies breed need to be cleaned up regularly.

Flies are typically considered only nuisances, although insects can agitate livestock and decrease animal health. The John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found evidence that houseflies near poultry operations may contribute to the dispersion of drug-resistant bacteria (Center for Livable Future, 2009). Since flies are attracted to and eat human food, there is a potential for spreading bacteria or pathogens to humans, including microbes that can cause dysentery and diarrhea (Bowman et al., 2000). Mosquitoes spread zoonotic diseases, such as West Nile virus, St. Louis encephalitis, and equine encephalitis.

Residences closest to the feeding operations experience a much higher fly population than average homes. To lower the rates of insects and any accompanying disease threats, standing water should be cleaned or emptied weekly, and manure or decaying organic matter should be removed twice weekly (Purdue Extension, 2007). For more specific insect vector information, please refer to NALBOH's vector guide (*Vector Control Strategies for Local Boards of Health*).

### **Pathogens**

Pathogens are parasites, bacterium, or viruses that are capable of causing disease or infection in animals or humans. The major source of pathogens from CAFOs is in animal manure. There are over 150 pathogens in manure that could impact human health. Many of these pathogens are concerning because



they can cause severe diarrhea. Healthy people who are exposed to pathogens can generally recover quickly, but those who have weakened immune systems are at increased risk for severe illness or death. Those at higher risk include infants or young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those who are immunosuppressed, HIV positive, or have had chemotherapy. This risk group now roughly compromises 20% of the U.S. population.

**Table 2** Select pathogens found in animal manure.

Pathogen	Disease	Symptoms
<i>Bacillus anthracis</i>	Anthrax	Skin sores, headache, fever, chills, nausea, vomiting
<i>Escherichia coli</i>	Colibacillosis, Coliform mastitis-metris	Diarrhea, abdominal gas
<i>Leptospira pomona</i>	Leptospirosis	Abdominal pain, muscle pain, vomiting, fever
<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>	Listeriosis	Fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
<i>Salmonella</i> species	Salmonellosis	Abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, chills, fever, headache
<i>Clostridium tetani</i>	Tetanus	Violent muscle spasms, lockjaw, difficulty breathing
<i>Histoplasma capsulatum</i>	Histoplasmosis	Fever, chills, muscle ache, cough rash, joint pain and stiffness
<i>Microsporium</i> and <i>Trichophyton</i>	Ringworm	Itching, rash
<i>Giardia lamblia</i>	Giardiasis	Diarrhea, abdominal pain, abdominal gas, nausea, vomiting, fever
<i>Cryptosporidium</i> species	Cryptosporidiosis	Diarrhea, dehydration, weakness, abdominal cramping

Sources of infection from pathogens include fecal-oral transmission, inhalation, drinking water, or incidental water consumption during recreational water activities. The potential for transfer of pathogens among animals is higher in confinement, as there are more animals in a smaller amount of space. Healthy or asymptomatic animals may carry microbial agents that can infect humans, who can then spread that infection throughout a community, before the infection is discovered among animals.

When water is contaminated by pathogens, it can lead to widespread outbreaks of illness. Salmonellosis, cryptosporidiosis, and giardiasis can cause nausea, vomiting, fever, diarrhea, muscle pain, and death, among other symptoms. *E.coli* is another serious pathogen, and can be life-threatening for the young, elderly, and immunocompromised. It can cause bloody diarrhea and kidney failure. Since many CAFO use sub-therapeutic antibiotics with their animals, there is also the possibility that disease-resistant bacteria can emerge in areas surrounding CAFOs. Bacteria that cannot be treated by antibiotics can have very serious effects on human health, potentially even causing death (Pew Charitable Trusts, n.d.).

There is also the possibility of novel (or new) viruses developing. These viruses generate through mutation or recombinant events that can result in more efficient human-to-human transmission. There has been some speculation that the novel H1N1 virus outbreak in 2009 originated in swine CAFOs in Mexico. However, that claim has never been substantiated. CAFOs are not required to test for novel viruses, since they are not on the list of mandatory reportable illness to the World Organization for Animal Health.

### **Antibiotics**

Antibiotics are commonly administered in animal feed in the United States. Antibiotics are included at low levels in animal feed to reduce the chance for infection and to eliminate the need for animals to expend energy fighting off bacteria, with the assumption that saved energy will be translated into growth. The main purposes of using non-therapeutic doses of antimicrobials in animal feed is so that animals will grow faster, produce more meat, and avoid illnesses. Supporters of antibiotic use say that it allows animals to digest their food more efficiently, get the most benefit from it, and grow into strong and healthy animals.

The trend of using antibiotics in feed has increased with the greater numbers of animals held in confinement. The more animals that are kept in close quarters, the more likely it is that infection or bacteria can spread among the animals. Seventy percent of all antibiotics and related drugs used in the U.S. each year are given to beef cattle, hogs, and chickens as feed additives. Nearly half of the antibiotics used are nearly identical to ones given to humans (Kaufman, 2000).

There is strong evidence that the use of antibiotics in animal feed is contributing to an increase in antibiotic-resistant microbes and causing antibiotics to be less effective for humans (Kaufman, 2000). Resistant strains of pathogenic bacteria in animals, which can be transferred to humans through the handling or eating of meat, have increased recently. This is a serious threat to human health because fewer options exist to help people overcome disease when infected with antibiotic-resistant pathogens. The antibiotics often are not fully metabolized by animals, and can be present in their manure. If manure pollutes a water supply, antibiotics can also leech into groundwater or surface water.

Because of this concern for human health, there is a growing movement to eliminate the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics with animals. In 2001, the American Medical Association approved a resolution to ban all low-level use of antibiotics. The USDA has developed guidelines to limit low-level use, and some major meat buyers (such as McDonald's) have stopped using meat that was given antibiotics that are also used for humans. The World Health Organization is also widely opposed to the use of antibiotics, calling for a cease of their low-level use in 2003. Some U.S. legislators are seeking to ban the routine use of antibiotics with livestock, and there has been legislation proposed to solidify a ban. The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA), which was introduced in 2009, has the support of over 350 health,

consumer, and environmental groups (H.R. 1549/S. 619). The act, if passed, would ban seven classes of antibiotics important to human health from being used in animals, and would restrict other antibiotics to therapeutic and some preventive uses.

### **Other Effects – Property Values**

Most landowners fear that when CAFOs move into their community their property values will drop significantly. There is evidence that CAFOs do affect property values. The reasons for this are many: the fear of loss of amenities, the risk of air or water pollution, and the increased possibility of nuisances related to odors or insects. CAFOs are typically viewed as a negative externality that can't be solved or cured. There may be stigma that is attached to living by a CAFO.

The most certain fact regarding CAFOs and property values are that the closer a property is to a CAFO, the more likely it will be that the value of the property will drop. The exact impact of CAFOs fluctuates depending on location and local specifics. Studies have found differing results of rates of property value decrease. One study shows that property value declines can range from a decrease of 6.6% within a 3-mile radius of a CAFO to an 88% decrease within 1/10 of a mile from a CAFO (Dakota Rural Action, 2006). Another study found that property value decreases are negligible beyond 2 miles away from a CAFO (Purdue Extension, 2008). A third study found that negative effects are largest for properties that are downwind and closest to livestock (Herriges, Secchi, & Babcock, 2005). The size and type of the feeding operation can affect property value as well. Decreases in property values can also cause property tax rates to drop, which can place stress on local government budgets.

## **Considerations for Boards of Health**

### **Right-to-Farm Laws**

With all of the potential environmental and public health effects from CAFOs, community members and health officials often resort to taking legal action against these industrial animal farms. However, there are some protections for farms in place that can make lawsuits hard to navigate. Right-to-farm laws were created to address conflicts between farmers and non-farming neighbors. They seek to override common laws of nuisance, which forbid people to use their property in ways that are harmful to others, and protect farmers from unreasonable controls on farming.

All 50 states have some form of right-to-farm laws, but most only offer legal protections to farms if they meet certain specifications. Generally, they must be in compliance with all environmental regulations, be properly run, and be present in a region first before suburban developments, often a year before the plaintiff moves to that area. These right-to-farm laws were originally created in the late 1970s and early 1980s to protect family farms from suburban sprawl, at a time when large industrial farms were not the norm. As industrial farms grew in size and number, the agribusiness industry lobbied for and achieved the passage of stricter laws in the 1990s, many of which are now being challenged in court by homeowners and small family farmers. Opponents to these laws argue that they deprive them of their use of property and therefore violate the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution.

Some state courts have overturned their strict right-to-farm laws, such as Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Kansas. Others such as Vermont have rewritten their laws. Vermont's updated right-to-farm bill

protects established farm practices as long as there is not a substantial adverse effect on health, safety, or welfare.

Boards of health need to be aware of what legal protection their state offers farms. Right-to-farm laws can hinder nuisance complaints brought about by community members. State laws can prevent local government or health officials from regulating industrial farms.

### **Board of Health Involvement with CAFOs**

Boards of health are responsible for fulfilling the three public health core functions: assessment, policy development, and assurance. Boards of health can fulfill these functions through addressing problems stemming from CAFOs in their communities. Specific public health services that can be tackled regarding CAFOs include monitoring health status, investigating health problems, developing policies, enforcing regulations, informing and educating people about CAFOs, and mobilizing community partnerships to spread awareness about environmental health issues related to CAFOs.

**Assessment:** Board of health members should ensure that there is an effective method in place for collecting and tracking public complaints about CAFOs and large animal farms. Since environmental health specialists at local health departments are often responsible for investigating complaints, the board of health must take measures to ensure that they are properly trained and educated about CAFOs. It is possible that the board of health may be responsible or choose to do some investigations itself. Schmalzried and Fallon (2008) advocate that local health districts adopt a proactive approach for addressing public concerns about CAFOs, stating that health districts can offer some services that may help ease public frustration with CAFOs. A fly trapping program can establish a baseline for the average number of flies present prior to the start-up of CAFOs or large animal farms, which can then establish if a fly nuisance exists in the area. Testing for water quality and quantity can provide evidence if CAFOs are suspected of affecting private water supplies. Boards of health can also monitor exposure incidences that occur in emergency rooms to determine if migrant or farm workers are developing any adverse health conditions as a result of their work environments. Establishing these programs benefit both members of the community and provide information to future animal farm operators, and local boards of health should recommend them if they've been receiving complaints about CAFOs.

**Policy Development:** Boards of health in many states can adopt health-based regulations about CAFOs, however, they may be met with some resistance. Humbolt County, Iowa, adopted four health-based ordinances concerning CAFOs that became models for regulations in other states, but the Iowa Supreme Court ruled the ordinances were irreconcilable with state laws. Boards of health that choose to regulate CAFOs can also be subject to pressure from outside forces, including possible lawsuits or withdrawal of funding. Boards of health should also consider working with other local officials to institute regulations on CAFOs, such as zoning ordinances.

**Assurance:** Boards of health can execute the assurance function by advocating for or educating about better environmental practices with CAFOs. Board members may receive complaints from the public about CAFOs, and boards can hold public meetings to receive complaints and hear public testimony about farms. If boards of health are not capable of regulating industrial farms in their communities, they can still try to collaborate with other local agencies that have jurisdiction. Board of health members can educate other local agencies and public officials about CAFOs and spread awareness about the environmental and health hazards. They can request a public hearing with the permitting agency of the

CAFO to express their concerns about the potential health effects. They can also work with agricultural and farm representatives to teach better environmental practices and pollution reduction techniques.

In many states, boards of health are empowered to adopt more stringent rules than the state law if it is necessary to protect public health. Board of health members should examine their state laws before they take any action regarding CAFOs to determine the most appropriate course of action. Any process should include an investigative period to gather evidence, public hearings, and a time for public review of draft policies.

## **Board of Health Case Studies**

### **Tewksbury Board of Health, Massachusetts**

Locals have complained about Krochmal Farms, a pig farm, for many years, but complaints have increased recently. The addition of a hog finishing facility to the farm coincided with the time that community member complaints grew. Most complaints are centered on the odor coming from the farm. The complaints were originally just logged when phone calls were received; however, the health department added a data tracking system as the number of complaints increased. After a complaint is received, the sanitarian or health director does a site visit to investigate.

The health director in Tewksbury filed an order of prohibition against the farm, which is allowed under Massachusetts law 111, section 143, for anything that threatens public health. The order of prohibition was appealed and the matter was taken to the board of health for a grievance hearing. The board of health hearing included months of testimony about the pig farm. The board of health is also doing a site assignment, which determines if a location is appropriate for treating, storing, or disposing of waste, including agricultural waste. The site assignment process includes both the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the local board of health. The board of health holds a public hearing process, while the DEP reviews the site assignment application. The board of health grants the site assignment only if it is concurrently approved by the DEP.

The health director in Tewksbury points out that the only laws the board of health is able to regulate the farm under are nuisance laws. There have been efforts by the community to do a home rule petition to address the air quality and pest management complaints. The home rule petition is currently working its way through the Massachusetts state house. The status of the petition is unknown.

The board of health has tried to work directly with the pig farm to manage complaints. The farm contains manure composting facilities and the health district has requested advance notice to warn the community before manure is treated or applied to the soil. The farm has adopted a new manure management system. This system uses Rapp technology to control odors and reduce ammonia and hydrogen sulfide levels. However, questions still remain as to whether this addition will fully solve the odor issue. Typically, systems using Rapp technology include an oil cap that floats on manure holding pools and helps seal odors inside. These techniques have been researched and proven to reduce odors. However, the Tewksbury farm did not install the oil cap, and it is unknown whether the exclusion of the cap will hinder the technology's ability to reduce odors.

The complaints about the farm primarily concern the odor that emanates from the farm. The complaints do include mention of health side effects, including nausea and burning eyes. The health director has also heard concerns about potential environmental effects from the pig manure. Community members are

worried the manure runoff is entering and contaminating Sutton Brook, since there has been flooding in that area. There has been no confirmation of this occurring. The board of health is aware that the farm has a nutrient management plan, but they are not allowed to request and find out what is incorporated in that plan.

The Tewksbury piggery is technically not classified as a CAFO, though it is believed to be the largest pig farm in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. The area around it has become densely populated and the community members state that they just want to live peacefully with the farm. The board of health has submitted multiple grant applications to study the health effects associated with the farm. After the site assignment process is complete, the board of health will decide how it will regulate the farm. At the beginning of 2010, the board of health was still working on drafting regulations for the pig farms.

### **Wood County Board of Health, Ohio**

Wood County, Ohio, contains two existing large dairy farms, both of which were proposed in 2001 to be expanded to over 1500 cows each. It is also the site for three other proposed dairy farms. There is a large community effort that supports restricting the operation and expansion of these farms, mainly represented by the community group Wood County Citizens Opposed to Factory Farms. The Wood County Board of Health became involved in investigating these dairy farms through this community group and other local officials. The Trustees of Liberty Township requested assistance from the Wood County Board of Health in supporting a moratorium on factory farm operations until local regulations were in effect. The trustees believed that manure runoff from the farms could contaminate local waterways, lower the ground water table, increase the presence of insect vectors, and devalue local properties.

The Wood County Health Director, in cooperation with the board of health, contacted nearby counties to determine what actions they had taken against farms in their communities. While the health director and board of health investigated action in the form of a nuisance regulation against the farms, they were advised that nuisance lawsuits filed against farms in Ohio were held to a tough standard, and they would be forced to demonstrate with scientific proof that the farms have a substantial adverse effect on health. They found that no other board of health in Ohio had opted to regulate farming operations and relied on the enforcement of existing state laws.

The board of health held a public forum to hear public opinion regarding the industrial farms. Ultimately, the Wood County Board of Health took actions other than regulations to help protect the health and environment of its community. They helped community members protect the safety of their water wells by offering free and low cost water well testing and inspections. They tested area ditch and water ways for fecal coliform bacteria, phosphorous, and nitrates to monitor the impact of farm runoff. They also purchased fly traps to monitor and count fly types to determine if the farms have caused an increase in insect vectors. Board of health members also met with state officials from the Ohio EPA in an effort to facilitate cooperation regarding the factory farms. While the Wood County Board of Health and Health Department chose not to institute any local regulations, they continue to monitor the situation and respond to community complaints.

### **Cerro Gordo County Board of Health, Iowa**

Officials in Cerro Gordo County, Iowa, began looking into regulating animal feeding operations after the number of hog farms in Iowa started to grow. Floods in North Carolina and new regulations in Colorado meant that many hog farms began relocating to Iowa. Many citizens had concerns over the effects of



CAFOs, and the Iowa State Association of Counties wanted to review air quality issues. Officials in Cerro Gordo County originally began working on a regulation that required inspections and was based on public health concerns, since farms were already exempt from any regulations related to zoning. However, Iowa state senators soon introduced legislation that passed and prevented any animal feeding operations from being regulated from a public health angle as well.

As Iowans were now prevented from regulating animal feeding operations in terms of zoning or public health, officials in Cerro Gordo County decided to place a moratorium on the construction of new animal feeding operations in that county. They wanted to temporarily stop the growth of animal feeding operations until they could get better science about their effects. Cerro Gordo County Ordinance #40, the “Animal Confinement Moratorium Ordinance,” went into effect on May 14, 2002. Since the moratorium did not address public health or zoning, officials were able to get around the rules and still have a way to temporarily control animal feeding operation growth in their county. The ordinance placed “a 1-year moratorium on any new construction, expansion, or activity occurring on land used for the production, care, feeding, or housing of animals.” The ordinance also afforded “local public health officials adequate time to appropriately assess health and environmental concerns that may be related to confined animal feeding operations and concentration of animals; establish objective measurable standards of enforcement; exercise the Board of Health’s responsibility to protect and improve the health of the public; refrain from impacting farm operators unfairly; and provide penalties for violations of the provisions hereof pursuant to Chapter 137, Code of Iowa” (Cerro Gordo County, 2002).

The moratorium was first adopted by the Cerro Gordo County Board of Health. It was then presented to the county board of supervisors by the health director on behalf of the board of health. Before the board of health adopted the moratorium, they held an investigative meeting in which representatives from the Iowa Farm Bureau and other industry spokespeople exchanged opinions on the issue of animal feeding operations. The moratorium was created through a collaboration between local and county officials—health department staff, the board of health, and the board of supervisors. The moratorium did not receive any help or backing from state officials, who were concerned about the political nature of the ordinance. However it did receive backing from a *Globe Gazette* editorial.

The moratorium was immediately met with resistance from state officials. The Cerro Gordo County Board of Supervisors was contacted by a local legislator, and the Iowa Farm Bureau stated they would challenge the county budget. The Iowa Farm Bureau threatened to take the county to court. There were concerns over the cost of a court trial, which was estimated to be as high as \$60,000. The county attorney doubted the legality of the moratorium and ultimately recommended removing it. The moratorium was in effect until June of 2005, when it was repealed by the county board of supervisors.

Since the moratorium was repealed there have been a few hog farms built in Cerro Gordo County, but the decline in pork prices has prevented any large growth of hog farms. Health officials believe that if the county had not implemented the animal confinement moratorium, there would have been many more farms built in their county, since many hog farms were built in counties south of Cerro Gordo County. There is now a process for siting new animal confinement operations in Iowa that uses a Master Matrix scoring system. The Cerro Gordo County Board of Supervisors tracks the Master Matrix system, but so far no animal feeding operations in Iowa who have applied using this system have been denied the right to build.

## Conclusion

Concentrated animal feeding operations or large industrial animal farms can cause a myriad of environmental and public health problems. While they can be maintained and operated properly, it is important to ensure that they are routinely monitored to avoid harm to the surrounding community. While states have differing abilities to regulate CAFOs, there are still actions that boards of health can and should take. These actions can be as complex as passing ordinances or regulations directed at CAFOs or can be simply increasing water and air quality testing in the areas surrounding CAFOs. Since CAFOs have such an impact locally, boards of health are an appropriate means for action. Boards of health should take an active role with CAFOs, including collaboration with other state and local agencies, to mitigate the impact that CAFOs or large industrial farms have on the public health of their communities.



## Appendix A: Regulatory Definitions of Large CAFOs, Medium CAFOs, and Small CAFOs

Animal Sector	Size Thresholds (number of animals)		
	Large CAFOs	Medium CAFOs <sup>1</sup>	Small CAFOs <sup>2</sup>
Cattle or cow/calf pairs	1,000 or more	300-999	Less than 300
Mature dairy cattle	700 or more	200-699	Less than 200
Veal calves	1,000 or more	300-999	Less than 300
Swine (over 55 pounds)	2,500 or more	750-2,500	Less than 750
Swine (under 55 pounds)	10,000 or more	3,000-9,999	Less than 3,000
Horses	500 or more	150-499	Less than 150
Sheep or lambs	10,000 or more	3,000-9,999	Less than 3,000
Turkeys	55,000 or more	16,500-54,999	Less than 16,500
Laying hens or broilers <sup>3</sup>	30,000 or more	9,000-29,999	Less than 9,000
Chickens other than laying hens <sup>4</sup>	125,000 or more	37,500-124,999	Less than 37,500
Laying hens <sup>4</sup>	82,000 or more	25,000-81,999	Less than 25,000
Ducks <sup>4</sup>	30,000 or more	10,000-29,999	Less than 10,000
Ducks <sup>3</sup>	5,000 or more	1,500-4,999	Less than 1,500

Data: Environmental Protection Agency

<sup>1</sup> Must also meet one of two “method of discharge” criteria to be defined as a CAFO or must be designated.

<sup>2</sup> Never a CAFO by regulatory definition, but may be designated as a CAFO on a case-by-case basis.

<sup>3</sup> Liquid manure handling system

<sup>4</sup> Other than a liquid manure handling system

## Appendix B: Additional Resources

American Public Health Association. *Precautionary moratorium on new concentrated animal feed operations*. <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/policysearch/default.htm?id=1243>

Center for a Livable Future. <http://www.livablefutureblog.com/>

Environmental Health Sciences Research Center. *Iowa concentrated animal feeding operation air quality study*. <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/ehsrc/CAFOstudy.htm>

Environmental Protection Agency. *Animal feeding operations*. [http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program\\_id=7](http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program_id=7)

Food and Water Watch. <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/>

Impacts of CAFOs on Rural Communities. [http://web.missouri.edu/ikerdj/papers/Indiana%20-%20CAFOs%20%20Communities.htm#\\_ftn1](http://web.missouri.edu/ikerdj/papers/Indiana%20-%20CAFOs%20%20Communities.htm#_ftn1)

Land Stewardship Project. <http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/index.html>

Midwest Environmental Advocates. <http://www.midwestadvocates.org/>

National Agriculture Law Center. *Animal feeding operations reading room*. <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/readingrooms/afos>

National Association of Local Boards of Health. *Vector control strategies for local boards of health*. <http://www.nalboh.org/publications.htm>

Pew Charitable Trusts. *Human health and industrial farming*. <http://www.saveantibiotics.org/index.html>

Pew Commission on Industrial Animal Farm Production. <http://www.ncifap.org/>

Purdue Extension. *Concentrated animal feeding operations*. <http://www.ansc.purdue.edu/CAFO/>

State Environmental Resource Center. <http://serconline.org>

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