

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

New York is at a farming crossroads. Farming is an integral part of our life and our communities. The Campaign for New York's Farming Future is designed to educate the public about CAFOs and to reconnect us to our food. Without nourishing food and clean water we cannot live. We have a right to clean drinking water and fresh, healthful food.

What is a CAFO?

A farm that raises livestock and seeks to maximize production by concentrating production. CAFOs can hold large numbers (some up to hundreds or thousands) of animals indoors. In New York, these animals are typically cows, hogs, turkeys, or chickens.

Are all Animal farms CAFOs?

The New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) classifies CAFOs based on number and type of livestock and recognizes three sizes of CAFOs- small, medium and large. Increased mechanization on the farm and subsidy programs that favor larger farms, have resulted in fewer farms in New York while the number of animals have substantially increased. Extra large or Mega CAFOs that confine thousands of animals are growing in New York, however they are subject to the same regulations as large CAFOs.

How do CAFOs affect me?

Improper farming practices on CAFOs can adversely affect public health and our shared environment. The large concentration of animals, animal waste and dead animals in a small space poses environmental and public health problems. As CAFOs become larger, so do concerns about air pollution and ground water contamination. CAFOs pose such a threat to local public health that the American Public Health Association, in 2003, called for a moratorium on the construction of new CAFOs. The US federal government acknowledges the waste disposal issue and requires that animal waste be stored in manure pits or lagoons.

What are manure storage lagoons?

Lagoons must be properly engineered and maintained. At a minimum a lagoon should be fitted with an impermeable liner to prevent waste from contaminating groundwater or local waterbodies. Additionally, manure must be managed properly so as not to exceed lagoon capacity. Manure, applied to fields as fertilizers, must be applied at agronomic rates and during proper weather conditions to avoid runoff from spread manure in the case of heavy rainfall. Manure storage system failure poses significant public health, environmental, and economic risk. In 2005, a manure storage pit failed resulting in the release of millions gallons of liquid manure into the Black River in Lewis County NY that threatened the public water supply, river-recreationists' health and killed over 200,000 fish.



How many CAFOs are in New York?

According to the DEC Currently there are 37,500 farms in New York and 616 of these farms are regulated CAFOs. Almost 80% of CAFOs are mature dairy operations and 7% are chicken operations raising both eggs and broilers. 470 CAFOs are medium farms that house 200-700 mature dairy cows while 146 farms are large CAFOs. The largest CAFO in NY houses 4,246 mature cows and 3,549 heifers. On average, large CAFOs in NY house 920 cows. (DEC December 2006)

What can be done to improve New York's farming future?

Only a handful of DEC staff possess the adequate background to analyze and implement critical plans. New York must add more staff with technical expertise to bolster agriculture environmental management. Recent court decisions require increased public transparency of a farm's Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan. Additionally, the public must support local farmers to keep them sustainable farming in New York by buying food directly from farms at farmer's markets or joining community supported agriculture programs.



Photo by: Ellie Van Houtte

What is needed to protect our environment, our health and our farmers?

Advancing sustainable agriculture over the long-term in New York requires regulatory reform, and enhanced public understanding of the needs of NY's sustainable farmers. New York should adopt a moratorium on new CAFOs in order to update our existing policies and develop the trained professionals needed in New York to oversee farm expansion. Farmers need on-the-farm assistance to comply with regulations. State and federal dollars should be prioritized for existing small and medium farms so that they remain viable and vibrant.

What can I do about a proposed CAFO in my community?

If your town is considering a new or expanded CAFO it is important to participate in the process and be involved in every step. Typically the local government, either the town, zoning, or planning board will have jurisdiction over the proposal. The state becomes involved in the permitting process for the farm. As you learn more about sustainable farming you can advocate for local farmers to receive grants and other financing to improve environmental management on the farm, which increases their profit, improves our environment and protects public health.



Painting by: Norman Rockwell

For more information please visit:

Campaign for Our Farming Future
Grace Factory Farm project
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
New York State AEM program
Food & Water Watch Factory Farm Mapping site

www.citizenscampaign.org/farming
<http://www.factoryfarm.org/>
<http://www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org/>
www.agmkt.state.ny.us/SoilWater/AEM/AEM.html
<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/factoryfarms/factory-farm-map>