

FINAL GEIS POLICY DOCUMENT NEARLY FINISHED

Background

Animal agriculture is a major component in Minnesota's economy. Recently it has gone through dramatic and unprecedented changes. A decade-long trend of increasing consolidation of smaller farms into larger ones, a continuing shift to bigger feedlots, and public concern over environmental impacts has generated much attention and controversy throughout our state.

The 1998 Legislature directed the EQB, along with a citizen advisory committee, to conduct a statewide study of animal agriculture and feedlots to assess their present and projected impact on Minnesota. The objective of the study is to provide balanced information on animal agriculture and recommendations on future alternatives to optimize livestock production in the state, while protecting public health, social stability and environmental quality.

This comprehensive study is the first in the United States to explore statewide impacts of the entire livestock industry. The GEIS study will offer citizens and policy-makers scientific data on the livestock industry and recommendations on future options for the industry. The final GEIS is due for completion by April or May 2002.

The EQB has already produced eleven final Technical work papers (TWPs), with the existing Scoping document and two volume Literature Summary to comprise the 5,000-page body of work known as the Animal Agriculture GEIS. This collection includes the Minnesota feedlot inventory, maps and spatial analysis. All information can be found on the [Feedlots](#) link of the Minnesota Planning Web site at: www.mnplan.state.mn.us.

TWP documents were prepared by scientific experts to hired to examine various areas of concern in detail. These TWPs are the most comprehensive single source available for understanding the complex role of animal agriculture in our society as of 2002.

TWPs examine these critical areas in greater depth than the 1,500 page Literature Summary previously completed by the University of Minnesota and its partners.

Major areas of TWP investigation are:

1. Description of Animal Agriculture
2. Social and Community Topics
3. Land Use and Conflict Resolution
4. Role of Government
5. Economic Impacts
6. Water Quality Issues
7. Air Quality Issues
8. Soils and Manure Issues
9. Human Health Issues
10. Animal Health and Welfare

Priorities for further research work were discussed and agreed to by the 24 member Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC). The Soil Phosphorus Index, Air Quality Dispersion Modeling and Health Effects of Air Emissions were determined the highest priorities for additional study. We also recognize the importance of ongoing medical research into the health effects of pathogens in meat and livestock products.

Recent Actions

Between July 2001 and Jan 2002, CAC committee meetings and EQB staff work continued on the Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) for Animal Agriculture. Draft and proposed final versions of the GEIS Summary document were presented, debated and revised. The Final GEIS Summary document will distill the technical information and make many policy recommendations on the critical issues. The document will also discuss the areas requiring further research and the steps needed to implement policy changes at every level of government.

The Environmental Quality Board (EQB) is directing final revisions to include State Agency concerns before approving the document as adequate. The Final GEIS will be completed and presented to the Minnesota Legislature for consideration in the Spring of 2002.

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

A 24-member citizen advisory committee was appointed by the EQB under direction from the Legislature. It is charged with ensuring that the public, including all interest groups and stakeholders, are involved in shaping the feedlot study and its findings.

Over the last six months, the CAC was meeting to complete their work on technical review of scientific information, policy development and recommendations. The final meeting of CAC took place November 2001. During this meeting, CAC reviewed the public comments given at the eight public meetings on the first draft GEIS Summary document issued August 15, 2001. A number of final revisions were made and one additional policy recommendation was developed concerning the moratorium on open-air swine lagoons.

Every member of CAC and their alternate devoted many hundreds of hours of their time to ensure that the technical and policy documents reflected all major points of view.

The CAC digested and processed the data to extract meaningful trends. They used their experiential wisdom to understand how this information could be used to develop policies that would equitably improve the situation. CAC sorted through the complex linkages between the economic, social, public health and environmental aspects of the animal agriculture industry. This requires a careful balancing of the real costs and benefits from any proposed actions.

New discoveries are being made and new technologies are being developed almost daily. Every discovery has the potential for harm as well as good. It seems the more we learn the more questions we must ask. Issues of widespread epidemics of animal pathogens, such as mad cow , BSE , anthrax, campylobacter and pseudorabies are complicated by the rising awareness of the hidden dangers posed by increasing antibiotic resistance in bacteria.

Near the very end of the process, America had to face the tragedy of September 11th. The immediate and long-term ramifications of this disaster clearly affect our priorities in livestock production. Bioterrorism has become a major concern as the anthrax attacks and Twin Towers suicide bombings made us realize the price we may have to pay for our open democratic society.

In the long-term, the economic downturn triggered by the terrorist attacks may place a heavy burden on America's farmers. No one works harder for their money than a farmer. The cold logic of economics has a difficult time accounting for the aesthetic and environmental values of sustainable agriculture. Driven mainly by what the market values and global competition on agricultural products, more farmers feel they must take advantage of the economies of scale by "getting big or getting out"

The Environmental Quality Board, staffed by Minnesota Planning, draws together five citizens and the heads of 10 state agencies that play a vital role in Minnesota's environment and development. The board develops policy, creates long-range plans and reviews proposed projects that would significantly influence Minnesota's environment.

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