



ENVIRONMENTAL
QUALITY BOARD

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The Generic Environmental Impact Statement on Animal Agriculture

What is the generic environmental impact statement on animal agriculture?

The generic environmental impact statement, or GEIS, is a statewide study intended to provide a full public examination of the facts about the environmental, economic, health and social effects of animal agriculture in Minnesota.

Why is the GEIS underway?

The need for the generic environmental impact statement on animal agriculture grows out of the recent controversy surrounding feedlots in Minnesota. This study was authorized and funded by the 1998 Minnesota Legislature. The legislation directs the Environmental Quality Board to "...examine the long-term effects of the livestock industry, as it exists and as it is changing, on the economy, environment and way of life of Minnesota and its citizens."

Who is responsible for preparing the GEIS?

The Environmental Quality Board, or EQB, is responsible for preparing the generic environmental impact statement on animal agriculture. The board is an independent state agency composed of 10 agency heads representing environmental and developmental agencies and five citizens appointed by the Governor.

The EQB has appointed a 25-member citizen advisory committee representing a wide variety of interests in the animal agriculture issue. The committee will advise the EQB on the scope and content of the generic environmental impact statement, including recommendations for changes in state policies related to animal agriculture in the future.

What are the steps in preparing a GEIS?

The Environmental Quality Board expects the generic environmental impact statement to be complete in two to three years. There are three broad phases in this process.

■ **Phase one:** The topics of concern are identified through what is called the "scoping" process. This phase has been completed, with a *Scoping Document* issued in December 1998. It identifies 12 topics of concern, including social/community, land use, role of government, industry structure and competitiveness, profitability and economic viability, external benefits and costs, water, air quality and odor, soils, manure and crop nutrients, human health, and animal health.

■ **Phase two:** The 12 topics identified in the *Scoping Document* will be studied and analyzed. This phase will begin with a literature review of all 12 topics. The Environmental Quality Board has issued a request for proposals for researchers to conduct the literature review. The board expects the contractors for this work to be selected, with advice from the citizen advisory council, in late March and the literature review to be completed in July 1999. The results of the literature review will enable the EQB working with the citizen advisory committee to determine any additional research that might be needed on any one topic. Phase two will result in a draft generic environmental impact statement.

■ **Phase three:** The draft generic environmental impact statement is revised based on comments; the result of these revisions will be the final generic environmental impact statement document.

How are citizens involved in this process?

All phases involve extensive input from the citizen advisory committee and the general public. There are at least four points in the process where citizens can systematically participate. During July 1998, prescoping meetings were held around the state to allow anyone to raise topics of concern. These results were analyzed by the

Environmental Quality Board staff, discussed by the citizen advisory committee and incorporated into a draft document outlining the scope of the generic environmental impact statement. The draft scope was approved by the EQB in September 1998. Another round of public meetings to hear citizen reaction to the draft scoping document was held in October and November 1998. The final *Scoping Document* was revised based on this input and adopted by the Environmental Quality Board in December 1998.

The citizen advisory committee will be involved in reviewing the result of the second phase of the study and advising the Environmental Quality Board on the adequacy or the need for revisions or further work. Once the EQB determines that the draft generic environmental impact statement is complete and ready for public review, a new series of public comment meetings on the draft will be held. Finally, the proposed final generic environmental impact statement will be made available for public review and comment. Although public meetings are not required by law, citizens will have the opportunity to testify at an Environmental Quality Board meeting as well as to provide written comments on whether the final generic environmental impact statement is adequate.

What is the cost of the generic environmental impact statement?

The Environmental Quality Board estimates the cost at between \$3 million and \$5 million. In 1999, Minnesota Planning and the EQB were allotted \$1.2 million to begin the generic environmental impact statement; this funding is likely to be spent by the end of the fiscal year. The EQB estimates that completing the GEIS will require an additional \$1.8 to \$3.8 million. A more accurate estimate will not be available until the literature review is complete in mid-1999. Minnesota Planning and the Environmental Quality Board have requested the minimum \$1.8 million from the 1999 Legislature for continuation of the GEIS in the next biennium.

What will the generic environmental impact statement accomplish?

The overall goal of the generic environmental impact statement is to help the citizens of Minnesota understand the issues surrounding animal agriculture and to provide a common base of information from which policy-making can occur. The success of the final generic environmental impact statement on animal agriculture will be measured by how well it educates and informs government officials, proposers of livestock facilities and the public on animal agriculture and the extent to which the information is reflected in future decisions and policy initiatives made or enacted by Minnesota state and local governments.

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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