

ANIMAL AGRICULTURE GEIS NEARLY FINISHED

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.

Major areas of GEIS 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
11. Geographic Information Systems

The EQB has already produced eleven final Technical work papers (TWP's), 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. Three successive drafts of a GEIS Summary document have been prepared and presented for public comment. All information can be found on the **Feedlots** link of the Minnesota Planning Web site at: www.mnplan.state.mn.us.

In response to the comments made by members of the public, the key State Agencies and the Environmental Quality Board the following changes have been made in the Animal Agriculture Generic Environmental Impact statement (GEIS):

The Introduction of the Final GEIS Summary document has been expanded to give more history and context to the process of how the GEIS developed over the four years the process occurred.

EQB staff created a new section of the document that outlines Agency policies and priorities. This chapter provides an overall summary of the GEIS project and technical reports as well as providing a forum for State Agencies to indicate their priorities and policies for regulating and managing livestock agriculture in Minnesota.

The policies and priorities section takes the individual policy recommendations made by CAC and tries to connect these with those parts of the technical information that seem to justify the recommendation. The document designates research priorities should additional monies become available and deals with the issue of updating the GEIS and implementing recommendations.

The public comment section was expanded and all written comments received, were placed verbatim in Appendix E, so that an interested reader can examine all public reaction to the document as submitted.

The response to comments section was expanded and grouped by topic; in Appendix B1 so that the interested reader can evaluate the nature of the comment and the responses to the questions raised.

A summary of all oral comments received at public meetings is included as Appendix B2 of the Final GEIS document.

The GEIS Summary document has been further modified to provide better answers to the scoping questions by extracting additional material from the relevant portions of the Literature Summaries, the Technical Work papers and the earlier drafts of the GEIS Summary documents.

In those cases where the scoping questions could not be completely or satisfactorily answered with the information collected this is pointed out in the text. Those areas demonstrating the largest information gaps are cited prominently as being priorities for further research funding in the newly created policies and priorities chapter.

The Animal Health and Well-being section has been extensively modified to improve the balance in the presentation of the two primary philosophies in this area.

All original CAC consensus policy recommendations are included in Appendix D as developed by topic.

The Feedlot and Manure Management Advisory Committee (FMMAC) of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture formed an ongoing subcommittee, which first met in April 2002 to consider and recommend research priorities on feedlots, initially targeting air quality and odor and nutrient management and water quality as their two most significant issues.

In response to concerns that the CAC ground-rule requiring unanimous consensus limited the mention of all policies discussed, EQB staff created Appendix G which contains all policies presented to the CAC for consideration, including those that were rejected, those where the vote was divided, those that were placed on hold and those policies recommended by Technical Work Paper consultants which CAC chose not to act upon.

A bibliography of the primary references and technical documents developed as part of the GEIS process is included in appendix F1. A bibliography of all references used in the set of GEIS documents is included in appendix F2.

All GIS mapping, explanatory text and metadata on the Land Management Information Center (LMIC) Feedlot Inventory and Spatial Analysis project is included as Appendix C to the Final GEIS Summary document.

The (LMIC) staff, EQB staff and MPCA staff cooperated to update the Feedlot Inventory with 2001 MPCA feedlot registration data and translated this data into the ARCINFO proprietary geographic information system to enhance spatial analysis of feedlots.

LMIC and EQB are developing a web based geographic information system product do allow online spatial analysis of feedlot information and other land use factors as needed by the end-user.

All technical documents, GIS maps and information, appendices and earlier drafts of the GEIS Summary documents were placed on a CD, cross-linked and indexed for ease of reference.

Recent Actions

Between January and August 2002, EQB staff met with senior staff from key state agencies to develop policy priorities and identify future research needs. The Environmental Quality Board (EQB) is directing final revisions to include State Agency concerns before approving the document as adequate. The EQB will be meeting in September 2002 to discuss their top policy priorities and the complex issue of GEIS adequacy.

In the rapidly changing world some parts of the study are aging faster than others, in spite of this the set of documents provides a useful basis of information for anyone interested in Minnesota livestock agriculture.

The Final GEIS will be completed and presented to the Minnesota Legislature for consideration in the 2003 session

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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