

**Do better to limit manure pollution**  
**By G. David Hurd**  
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The time is right for Iowa legislators to take action on a difficult but solvable problem that is critical to Iowans' quality of life: Livestock manure pollution. They have shown they can lead on making improvements to Iowa's environment; they did so the last two sessions when they funded water quality programs.

Many reasons are given for not taking action. The Iowa Environmental Council disagrees. Some have suggested our existing laws just "need time to work." Although we have seen some improvement based on legislation passed in the 1990s, significant problems affecting Iowans have not been addressed:

Our laws don't keep manure away from particularly valuable and vulnerable resources. Right now, manure is being stored and spread next to sources of our drinking water, state parks, and popular fishing and boating areas.

Our laws don't keep manure out of floodplains. Right now, large quantities of manure are being stored in 100-year floodplains, making our waterways particularly vulnerable to contamination from catastrophic spills during floods.

Our laws don't require air quality monitoring near large confinement facilities. Studies show that people living near large confinement operations are experiencing health problems as well as a diminished quality of life.

Our laws don't use phosphorus to determine appropriate manure application rates. When land application rates of manure are based solely on nitrogen, phosphorus accumulates and leads to pollution of water bodies and the death of fish and other aquatic life.

Acting on these problems is important, because this is not a "nuisance" issue but a human health issue. People living near large animal feeding operations, including farmers who have been there for generations, are reporting sore throats, excessive coughing, diarrhea, and headaches. Researchers, including many at the University of Iowa and in other states such as North Carolina and Minnesota, have documented these health problems. Legislative leaders and state agencies such as the Iowa Department of Public Health must recognize and respond to these concerns.

Taking action is acting for the family farmer, not against. Right now, rural Iowa is suffering. As Blaine Nickles, a farmer in Wright County said, "Large confinement operations are here to stay. But we need adequate protections so that we can still live in our homes and have the same quality of life that we had before."

Certain counties have been particularly hard hit by concentrations of livestock manure. Visit

the corridor along Highway 69 in Wright County and ask yourself if you would like to live there.

However, poor management of manure affects many of the state's urban areas as well. Most of the major rivers in Iowa (including the Des Moines, Iowa, Cedar, and Skunk rivers) flow through the central part of Iowa that is home to large concentrations of livestock facilities. Communities downstream from these facilities are experiencing water quality problems, including high nitrate levels in drinking water sources. In addition, fish kills and pathogens affect the waters all Iowans use for recreation.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has proposed changes that would respond to many of the problems. Its proposal includes many of the Council's priorities, including additional protections for parks and important recreational areas, and additional staff so that the agency can better administer its manure management programs as well as make sure that producers are in compliance.

The Iowa Environmental Council believes the DNR proposals are fair and reasonable. Also, legislators should pass a bill allowing local control over the siting of large confinement facilities, such as Republican Senator Jeff Angelo of Creston proposed. Rural Iowans feel disenfranchised, and are simply asking for rules to protect their quality of life and their property values.

Many Iowa farmers are good land stewards, and they follow the steps we propose. They don't overload the soil with nutrients. They don't store livestock manure in areas that frequently flood, and they don't locate their facilities near parks and recreational areas.

The Iowa Environmental Council asks legislators and the Iowans they represent to answer these questions: Is doing nothing on Iowa's manure management problem the way to get Iowans to stay? Is this the way to entice people to come to our state? Perhaps most of all: Is this the way to treat people who have been here for generations?

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