

Wisconsin Trout Unlimited

CAFO Position

February 4, 2012 – Original approval

August 24, 2015 – Amendment passed

Agriculture is important in Wisconsin's economy and contributes to the livelihood of many people. The state's freshwater resources—its streams, rivers, inland lakes, Great Lakes coastal waters, and groundwater—also contribute to the economy and quality of life. Excessive use of manure, chemical fertilizer, and pesticides often degrades the quality of streams and other surface waters, and sometimes harms groundwater, a major source of drinking water.

The dynamics of the dairy farms in Wisconsin are shifting toward Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) from smaller family owned farms. CAFOs are defined as farms containing 1,000 or more animal units. Wisconsin Trout Unlimited urges that a closer look be taken at the regulations and permitting practices of existing and future farms. These farms often apply manure, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides to land at high concentrations. Where CAFOs occur in landscapes that contain trout streams and other surface waters, regardless of size, quality of these ecosystems can suffer. According to the EPA, states with higher concentrations of CAFOs experience on average 20 to 30 serious water quality problems per year as a result of manure management issues. Pollutants associated with CAFO waste are nitrogen, phosphorus, pathogens, salt, antibiotics, arsenic, pesticides and hormones. The degradation of water quality creates unfavorable conditions for aquatic life and sometimes results in fish kills. Another concern is the amount of ground water extracted. A typical CAFO will use 52.5 million gallons of water in a year for their daily operations, with the potential for significant effects on aquifers and groundwater flows to area streams.

We recommend the following to minimize potential adverse effects of CAFOs on trout streams, other surface waters, and groundwater in Wisconsin: 1) That the WDNR and Wisconsin DATCP consider soil type and geology in the CAFO permitting process. CAFOs in areas with sandy soil or where shallow soil overlies fractured bedrock pose particular risks to trout streams and groundwater. Two farms in Adams County are now spreading 14,000 loads of manure annually on 54,000 acres of land in areas with sandy soils. Testing of soils in those areas is suggested to occur only once every four years. 2) That the WDNR and Wisconsin DATCP place limits on the size and density of CAFOs in order to minimize the threat of CAFOs to surface water and groundwater. When construction is completed on the New Chester Dairy with plans for 9,100 animals, which is located 10 miles to the Southwest of an existing CAFO with 4,300 animals, there will be 2 farms drawing from the same watershed. 3) That the WDNR and Wisconsin DATCP increase the frequency and intensity of water quality monitoring (surface water and groundwater) at risk locations and surrounding areas. A pumping permit was issued to the Richfield CAFO with full knowledge and acceptance of the scientific evidence and ongoing research that Pleasant Lake will lose 2 inches of water each year and nearby streams such as the Roche Cri, Tagatz and Chaffee will have reduced stream flows of 5% at a pumping rate of 52.5 million gallons per year. These efforts would result in quicker detection of threats to trout streams and other aquatic systems, as well as increased preventive or remedial actions.

Wisconsin Trout Unlimited recommends tighter monitoring of existing farms, discretion used in the issuing of permits to more than one farm per watershed, and finally, that there be close examination of the geological aspects of any CAFO site to address potential harm to surface and groundwater.