
WA CAFO Permit Fact Sheet

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Reasons to Oppose CAFOs

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) are factory farms where animals are maintained in small spaces. Food is delivered to the animals and manure is mechanically removed – all using fossil fuels. Production and storage of large amounts of excrement in small areas creates a whole set of problems that are not encountered with traditional farming. For these and other reasons, the Friends of Toppenish Creek strongly oppose CAFOs, and object to applying the positive attributes of traditional farming to CAFOs.

In 1970, the average American spent 4.2% of his or her income to buy 194 lbs. of red meat and poultry annually. In 2005, Americans spent, on average, 2.1% of their annual income to buy 221 lbs. of red meat and poultry. ¹ Abundant, cheap meat results from the current CAFO system, but the hidden price is too high.

1. CAFOs contribute to global warming and climate change

According to scientists from Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley, phasing out animal agriculture represents “our best and most immediate chance to reverse the trajectory of climate change.”²

Far too much land is devoted to raising food for farm animals, instead of food for people. Clearing forests to support cows contributes to global warming and climate change.^{3,4}

2. CAFOs cause fish kills

In 1991, the Neuse River in North Carolina suffered one of the largest fish kills of any river in America. In a matter of days during September 1991, over one billion fish perished due to manure flowing into the river from hog CAFOs in the area.

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Was this a one-time event? No, fish are still dying in the Neuse River from manure pollution. In 2009 over 100,000,000 perished there. In 2020 another fish kill on the Neuse came close to that number.³ Fish kills from manure spills happen all over the country.^{5,6}

3. CAFOs pollute ground and surface waters

“Pathogens, excess nutrients, and other contaminants present in animal waste (further) endanger salmon by creating hypoxic and/or toxic environments that kill off their food sources. This, in turn, hurts other species depending on salmon as a food source, impacting marine and aquatic life all along the food chain.” Orca Conservancy.⁷

In South Yakima County there is a cluster of five CAFO dairies where the Environmental Protection Agency documents that 61% of domestic wells one mile down gradient have water with nitrate levels above the safe drinking water standard of 10 mg/L. One monitoring well at this site has nitrate levels as high as 234 mg/L.⁸

When efforts to address this problem began in 2010, officials told the public that the aquifer would be cleaned up in five years. Today, fifteen years later, there is no improvement and taxpayers spend millions to address the problem.

4. CAFOs require massive amounts of tax payer support

The estimated US \$12.06/hundred wt. support to U.S. dairy production in 2015 was equivalent to 45% of U.S. cost of production of milk or 71% of the market returns for milk as reported by USDA.⁹

How can Washington CAFOs not thrive when they receive tax breaks at every turn and are allowed to withdraw as much groundwater as they want in parts of the state where the annual rainfall is seven inches? ¹⁰

5. CAFOs remove local control over our environment and neighborhoods

“U.S. agriculture suffers from abnormally high levels of concentration, meaning just a handful of corporations control nearly all of our food production, processing, and distribution. In a healthy economy, multiple firms can sell their goods to multiple buyers in an open, competitive market.” Farm Aid.¹¹

6. CAFOs reduce genetic diversity in farm animals

“Despite the great betterment in production efficiency (related to genetic selection of high yielding dairy cattle), strong drawbacks have occurred along the way. First, across-breed genetic diversity reduced dramatically, with the worldwide use of few common dairy breeds, as well as a substantial reduction in within-breed genetic diversity. Intensive selection for milk yield has also resulted in unfavorable genetic responses for traits related to fertility, health, longevity, and environmental sensitivity.” Science Direct.¹²

7. CAFOs pollute the air

In Washington State 1.5% of the approximately 100 million metric tons of greenhouse gas equivalents comes from manure management, i.e. manure lagoons. ¹³

“Science evolves and policy must evolve with the science. The administration has made its methane pledge, and Washington needs to do its part. DOE has failed to consider the impacts of climate change in

authorizing CAFO discharge into our waterways. Manure lagoons contribute to global warming. Storing manure in lagoons produces methane, a GHG far more potent than CO₂. Washington State sends over a million metric tons of GHG CO₂ equivalent into the atmosphere every year from manure lagoons. When cows are kept on pasture, this does not happen. We sympathize with farmers who followed the best available advice when they built lagoons years ago. They were told, and they believed, that lagoons would protect the environment. Now, we know that the side effects are huge, and we wish to see farmers assisted in transitioning away from this practice.” Olympic Physicians Climate Task Force.¹⁴

8. CAFOs require unhealthy levels of pesticides and other chemicals

If someone wanted to create superbugs that are resistant to currently available drugs, that person would confine large numbers of animals in small spaces and feed them low doses of antibiotics. Under these CAFO conditions pathogens are not destroyed but are given the opportunity to evolve and learn to resist.¹⁵

Thank you for reading and thinking about these issues.

Friends of Toppenish Creek

You have received this Fact Sheet because you are on a list of potentially interested parties. If you do not want to receive further information, please contact Jean Mendoza at jeanrmendoza@icloud.com

¹ PEW Commission. Putting Meat on the Table. Available at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/0001/01/01/putting-meat-on-the-table>

² Rapid global phase out of animal agriculture has the potential to stabilize greenhouse gas levels for 30 years and offset 68 percent of CO₂ emissions <https://journals.plos.org/climate/article?id=10.1371/journal.pclm.0000010>

³ How Much of the World's Cropland is Actually Used to Grow Food?
<https://www.vox.com/2014/8/21/6053187/cropland-map-food-fuel-animal-feed>

⁴ To Slow Global Warming, U.N. Warns Agriculture Must Change
<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2019/08/08/748416223/to-slow-global-warming-u-n-warns-agriculture-must-change>

⁵ A fish kill was observed on the Neuse and Trent Rivers on October 18th, 2022. <http://www.neuseriver.com/fish-kills/>

⁶ Iowa DNR Fish Kill Data Base.
<https://programs.iowadnr.gov/fishkill/Summaries#:~:text=Most%20fish%20killed%20in%20a%20single%20event%201%2C295%2C205,the%20305%20%28b%29%20Assessment%20of%20Iowa%27s%20Water%20Quality.>

⁷ Orca Conservancy Public Comments re NPDES Permits for CAFOs.
Available at https://scs-public.s3-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/env_production/oid100/did200008/pid_201633/assets/merged/f80iikh_document.pdf?v=35CYDB28R

⁸ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region X, Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater. Available at <https://www.epa.gov/wa/lower-yakima-valley-groundwater>

⁹ U.S. Federal and State Subsidies to Agriculture.
<http://www.greyclark.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/US-Subsidies-Post-2014-Farm-Bill-FEB-2018.pdf>

¹⁰ 1945 Stock Watering Law. RCW 90.44.050

¹¹ How Much Power do Corporations Wield?
<https://www.farmaid.org/issues/corporate-power/corporate-power-in-ag/>

¹² Review: Genetic selection of high-yielding dairy cattle.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S175173112100135X#:~:text=Genetic%20selection%20for%20increased%20milk%20yield%20has%20been,heavily%20relying%20on%20cereals%20and%20protein-sources%20%28FAO%2C%202006%29>

¹³ Washington State Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, 1990 to 2019. Available at <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/2202054.html>

¹⁴ Olympic Physicians Climate Task Force - Public Comments re NPDES Permits for CAFOs. Available at https://scs-public.s3-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/env_production/oid100/did200008/pid_201633/assets/merged/dh0piq4_document.pdf?v=YT5VAQDMZ

¹⁵ Is Antibiotic Feed in CAFOs a Threat to Human Health? <https://blogs.umass.edu/natsci397a-cross/is-antibiotic-feed-in-cafos-a-threat-to-human-health/#:~:text=Antibiotic%20resistant%20bacteria%20or%20superbugs%20are%20becoming%20a,is%20the%20overuse%20that%20creates%20antibiotic%20resistant%20bacteria>