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July 18th, 2025

Office of Administrative Hearings
Attn William Moore, OAH
600 North Robert Street, PO Box 64620,
St. Paul, Minnesota 55164.

Greetings, Mr. Moore,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on planned amendments to Minnesota Rules governing animal feedlots (Chapter 7020, [Revisor's ID Number R-04928](#)).

[Friends of the Mississippi River](#) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities. We believe it is time for the state to improve its efforts to prevent the unintended contamination of groundwater and surface waters from animal feedlots and the manure they produce.

As you know, it's been 25 years since Minnesota significantly revised the rules for animal feedlots and the manure they produce. We acknowledge that manure can be an important source of nutrients for Minnesota's croplands, and we want Minnesota's farm operations to be successful and sustainable. However, when improperly applied to croplands, manure can contribute to polluting our lakes, rivers, and streams. In addition, manure can contaminate groundwater, making our water unsafe to drink.

This is no small issue. Minnesota is home to more than [18,000 feedlots](#) that, by some estimates, produce nearly [49 million tons of waste per year](#). This waste has potential consequences for Minnesota's water resources, including the Mississippi River. That's why addressing the impacts of pollution from feedlots and field-applied manure is included in high-level, multi-agency strategies for achieving clean and healthy waters in Minnesota, including:

- The [Minnesota Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#)
- The [Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement](#)
- The [Minnesota Water Management Framework](#)
- The [Minnesota State Water Plan](#)
- The [Clean Water Council Strategic Plan](#)
- The [Minnesota Clean Water Road Map](#)
- The [Minnesota Water Sustainability Framework](#)

- Multiple [Total Maximum Daily Load](#) (TMDL), [Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategies](#) (WRAPS), and [Groundwater Restoration and Protection Strategies](#) (GRAPS)

While improved feedlot rules will not resolve Minnesota's water quality challenges, it's equally clear that we can and must improve upon the status quo. Therefore, we respectfully request that the state consider the following amendments to Minnesota's feedlot rules (Chapter 7020):

1. **Permitting and environmental assessment**

- Require operating permits (NPDES / SDS) for all feedlots at or above 600 animal units. According to analysis from the [Environmental Working Group](#), there were 2,316 feedlots with between 600 and 999 animal units in Minnesota in 2024, collectively producing more than 12 million tons of manure.
- Require operating permits (NPDES / SDS) for all feedlots at or above 300 annual units in [vulnerable groundwater areas](#).
- Require monitoring of the largest feedlots for surface and subsurface discharges of manure, nutrients, and bacteria.
- Remove the potential for an ownership structure to split larger feedlots into multiple smaller operations for the purposes of permitting and/or registration. For example, the state might establish that feedlots under the same ownership structure located within a county, or within 25 miles but in an adjacent county, are not to be considered separate facilities.

2. **Manure management**

- Require all feedlots with 300 or more animal units to prepare a manure management plan and maintain land application records. Such records should be shared with the MPCA in a manner that allows the public to assess the efficacy of feedlot rules in protecting water quality over time.
- Require the largest feedlots to monitor the fields where they apply manure to ensure manure is not running off into waterways or seeping into groundwater.
- Consider strategies for prohibiting manure application on frozen or snow-covered ground or when there is a high probability of significant precipitation predicted. We acknowledge that this may require additional public cost-share for enhanced manure storage for some smaller facilities.
- When manure is transferred from a feedlot owner/operator to a third party for cropland application, require that the recipient also follow all relevant manure management plan requirements.
- Consider additional protections on manure application in [vulnerable groundwater areas](#), including the southeastern karst region, the central sands region, and Drinking Water Supply Management Areas. These additional protections could include cover crops, diversified crop rotations, and strict limits on application that account for both manure and non-manure fertilization rates.

3. **Setbacks and livestock access**

- Require and enforce a 50-foot setback for land application of manure along certain waters. This includes rivers, lakes, and streams that are (i) impaired due to

excess nutrients or bacteria, or (ii) discharge into downstream waters that are impaired due to excess nutrients or bacteria.

- b. Address the risks of livestock access to rivers, lakes, and streams. This includes the prohibition of livestock from a feedlot capable of holding 300 or more animal units from entering any waters that are impaired due to excess nutrients or bacteria, if it is determined that animal manure is a significant contributing factor to the impairment.

Thank you for your consideration,

Trevor Russell

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Trevor Russell', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Water Program Director
Friends of the Mississippi River