



**DEALING WITH FARM, MANURE AND
LIVESTOCK RELATED COMPLAINTS
IN STEARNS COUNTY, MINNESOTA
* * * GUIDANCE FOR LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS * * ***



SPONSORED BY

*Stearns County Board of Commissioners
Stearns County Dairy Advisory Committee
Stearns County Feedlot Review Committee
Stearns County Environmental Services Department*

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INTRODUCTION

Rural Stearns County is seeing an influx of new residential home construction. With new non-farm neighbors moving into the agricultural zoned areas of Stearns County, the potential exists for farm, manure and livestock related complaints to be levied against your livestock operation. However, there are some voluntary Best Management Practices (BMP) that can be developed and implemented by you to alleviate this potential. BMPs can be low cost or may require more substantial financial resources to enhance public perception of your livestock operation or to bring your operation into compliance. There are also some specific State and County rules and regulations that may already require you to develop and implement certain BMPs if you have a feedlot runoff problem.

STEPS TO LIMIT THE POTENTIAL TO RECEIVE FARM, MANURE OR LIVESTOCK RELATED COMPLAINTS?

1. **Obtain permits.** Be sure to obtain a construction site permit before you construct a new structure. If your livestock operation is not permitted, contact the Stearns County Environmental Services Department (ESD) for more information. Stearns County staff are ready and willing to assist you with bringing your operation into compliance. Stearns County does not want un-permitted livestock operators to be apprehensive of the permitting process. Stearns County has permitted livestock operations since 1998 and has assisted hundreds of livestock operators with bringing their operation into compliance with County and State feedlot rules.

PERMITS ARE REQUIRED BY THE STATE AND STEARNS COUNTY FOR VARIOUS CONSTRUCTION AND RELATED ACTIVITIES.



2. **Obtain other certifications.** Obtaining and displaying certification signs that indicate that your farm is a River Friendly Farm, a Grade A Dairy, an organic farm or other certifications will boost public perception of your operation. The Minnesota Milk Producers Association and other livestock associations have environmental certification programs available as well. [VOLUNTARY.](#)
3. **Develop and implement a Good Neighbor Plan.** Being a good neighbor goes both ways and you and your neighbors have equal responsibilities to ensure good relationships. Simply informing neighbors about when you will be agitating a manure storage structure and where you will be land applying manure may limit complaints about odor, manure/mud on roads as well as noise and dust. Let new neighbors know that livestock and farm equipment make noise during the year. Have an open house for new neighbors and encourage discussion with new neighbors about farming practices.

GOOD NEIGHBOR PLANS AND MMPs ARE REQUIRED BY STEARNS COUNTY. MMPs ARE ALSO REQUIRED BY THE STATE.



4. **Develop and implement a Manure Management Plan (MMP).** Meeting manure application setbacks, removing manure/mud from roads and implementing a MMP can be helpful and is required. Removing manure accumulations from bale feeders in pastures or removing manure stockpiles within a farmstead will improve perceptions when easily viewed from public roads. Incorporate your manure, as this will reduce odor and nutrients will not be lost. Inform new neighbors that manure applications will occur throughout the year and that different types of application methods and equipment will be used.

5. ***Develop and implement an odor management plan.*** Utilizing biofilters or organic/synthetic covers on manure storage structures, hauling out spoiled feed, removing manure stockpiles and implementing other methods of odor control may be your best options to limit odor related complaints. Become updated on current odor control techniques and developing technologies for odor control. Let new neighbors know that different levels of odors and intensities may be evident depending upon the animal species being raised.



ODOR MANAGEMENT PLANS AND ANIMAL CARCASS DISPOSAL PLANS ARE REQUIRED BY STEARNS COUNTY. THE STATE WILL REQUIRE THESE PLANS FOR NPDES SITES AS WELL.

6. ***Develop and implement an animal carcass disposal plan.*** Options to dispose of animal carcasses include composting, burial or rendering. Animal carcasses piled up next to barns, roads or bodies of water that are easily viewable from public roads will not enhance public perceptions of the livestock industry in Stearns County. While rendering and burial are still allowable by the State and Stearns County, composting animal mortalities may be the best, environmental friendly option.
7. ***Inform neighbors of expansion and modification plans prior to public notices being sent out.*** If you are expanding or modifying your operation and a Conditional Use Permit, variance or other permit is required, be sure to visit informally with your neighbors to ensure good communication. Neighbors that become aware of expansion or modification plans via a public notice will be less apt to visit with you about your proposal. **VOLUNTARY.**
8. ***Keep your farm neat and tidy.*** Regularly mowing grass within a farmstead, spraying weeds around buildings, repairing fences along roads, painting buildings and keeping farm implements clean and in good condition is also beneficial. There are many other things that you can do to enhance public perception about your operation such as landscaping around buildings, installing windbreaks, etc. **VOLUNTARY.**

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF A COMPLAINT IS MADE ABOUT MY LIVESTOCK OPERATION?

Stearns County is required by law to investigate official complaints regarding farm, manure and livestock related complaints. Stearns County **will not** shut your operation down when a complaint is received. This is a **common misunderstanding** that causes livestock producers to be concerned about ESD staff visiting their operations. Rather, ESD staff **will work with you** to address any problems that are identified at your operation during a site visit. Livestock production is a vital part of the economic engine in Stearns County and a diverse livestock industry is environmentally sound when BMPs are implemented.

1. ESD staff will contact you to conduct a site visit to determine the extent of the complaint. A **reasonable** time will be scheduled with you to conduct the site visit. Remember, ESD staff are there to assist you and to work with you towards a solution, not to shut your operation down.
2. If the results of a site visit by the ESD indicates a pollution or odor problem, remedial action will be required. A **reasonable** timeline will be implemented to bring your operation into compliance with the appropriate County or State requirements. If your operation is not permitted, ESD staff will guide you through the permitting process.
3. The name of the individual that made an official complaint about your operation is confidential. The name will not be released. Again, ESD staff will work with you to bring your operation into compliance.
4. Cost-share funds may be available to bring your operation into compliance. ESD staff will guide you to the appropriate agencies for technical and cost-share assistance.

COMMON TYPES OF FARM, MANURE AND LIVESTOCK RELATED COMPLAINTS

A number of types of complaints can be made which include but are not limited to over applications of manure; dead animals; flies; odor; manure/mud on roads; noise; dust; open lot runoff from concrete or earthen lots; livestock access to lakes, rivers, streams or wetlands and various other related complaints. Again, ESD staff will work with you to correct any problems within reasonable timelines. Below are some examples which might prompt a complaint. Please note that the pictures within this document are from other states. There are no Stearns County farms depicted by these photos.

Picture 1



The livestock operation in picture 1 has manure contaminated runoff leaving the open concrete lot. A solution may be to install a filter strip or to better manage the runoff. Other pollution abatement structures may need to be installed.

Picture 2



Complaints may also be due to odor from an open air lagoons. The solution here may be the establishment of an organic cover or the installation of a synthetic cover. Other odor abatement controls may need to be installed.

Picture 3



Another complaint may be due to cattle having access to a stream. In this picture, a stream runs directly through an earthen beef feedlot. The open lot may need to be rebuilt or reconfigured to restrict cattle access to the stream.

Picture 4



Complaints may also be due to odor from manure applications, such as the irrigation of manure. While the irrigation of manure is still allowed in Stearns County, meeting application setbacks is important. Let neighbors know about manure irrigation before it happens.

STEARNS COUNTY ESD

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