

Final Draft

Guest Column

As the EPA advisor on agriculture policy, I would like to address some areas of concern with the EPA Air Quality Compliance Agreement for Animal Feeding Operations. This information is important as we approach the July 1, 2005 deadline for farmers to sign up to participate in this agreement.

There have been widespread misunderstandings about the rationale behind the emissions monitoring study and the benefits from it.

Recently, groups have alleged that emissions from animal feeding operations have violated provisions of the Clean Air Act, as well as other acts not previously considered applicable to the farming community. In addition, a 2002 report by the National Academy of Sciences called on EPA to improve its method for estimating emissions from animal feeding operations. Recognizing the lack of information about the type and amount of farm emissions, EPA and some in the agriculture industry came together to develop the framework for animal feeding operations emission monitoring study and compliance agreement.

This industry-funded emissions monitoring program will provide EPA and the farming community with the background needed to determine if, in fact, there are any federal air compliance requirements. The agreement will also ensure that animal feeding operations comply with applicable environmental requirements and will gather data the agency needs to make informed policy decisions. Without this intensive monitoring, and without this sound scientific information, beef, poultry, swine and dairy farms continue to be subject to complaints that their operations are not in compliance with federal air laws.

The voluntary compliance agreement makes this monitoring study possible. Participants in the study agree to pay a small fee based on the size and number of farms in the operation, as well as contribute to a fund that will cover the cost of the two-year study. The approximately 28 farms ultimately selected for the program agree to allow monitoring at their barns, lagoons, and waste or manure storage piles.

Participation in the study implies no admission of EPA air-quality breaches, and farms will not be sued for past violations, provided there is no imminent danger to human health.

The environmental challenges facing the agriculture industry are real. The industry has a choice to take part in this voluntary program that uses good science to create sound public policy.

For additional information, please contact Sharon Nizich, EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards at (919) 541-2825, or visit our Web site:

<http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/animals.html>.

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