IMMAG - Iowa Manure Management Action Group

Helping small feedlots and dairies reduce impacts on water quality

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The Small Feedlot Project is an educational outreach initiative to assist operators of small open feedlots and small dairies in assessing feedlot and outdoor pen areas for potential runoff of manure and nutrients and to implement practices and strategies to mitigate potential manure impacts on water quality. For the purpose of this project, the term 'small feedlot' will be defined as beef or dairy operations that confine less than 1,000 animal units (less than 1,000 head beef or immature dairy; or less than 700 head mature dairy) in an open feedlot or pen situation.

One of the project goals is to raise awareness about potential impacts of manure run-off from these farms. Being exposed to the elements, open feedlots must be equipped to control and manage the manure nutrients and pollutants that move out of the feedlot pens with runoff water during snow melt and rainfall events. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has partnered with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to place water quality testing kits in 20 counties. These kits are available for livestock producers to use to check water quality in streams below their feedlots and cow yards. The test kits will come with an instructional video and a fact sheet on water quality testing and impacts. The results of this water testing are confidential and livestock producers are not required to share this information. This testing can help identify if runoff is reaching the stream and the potential impact on aquatic life.

The second goal of this project is to provide written material in the form of manuals and fact sheets that can assist producers in making decisions on what kinds of manure control structures or management practices will help eliminate runoff discharges from their feedlots. The written material is specific to challenges often faced by smaller farms such as constraints on geography, time management, financial and technical resources.

The third goal of this project is to identify and feature demonstration farms across Iowa where runoff control and management strategies appropriate for small feedlots and dairies can be installed and shown to other producers.

The final goal of this project is to pull together existing resources as well as the newly written materials into one easily accessible location for small feedlot operators and their technical advisers. Examples of other types of information available include a video discussing how a small feedlot might actually be a medium concentrated animal feeding operation, and self assessment tools that will help farmers identify risks on their farms that may impact water quality. All of this information, including a list of ISU Extension
and Outreach offices that are offering the water quality kits, will be available through the Small Feedlot and Dairy Operations web page, a subset of the Iowa Manure Management Action Group (IMMAG) web page at: http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/smallfeedlotsdairy.html

Specific questions regarding this project can be addressed to Shawn Shouse at 712-769-2600 sshouse@iastate.edu or Angie Rieck-Hinz at 515-294-9590 amrieck@iastate.edu. You may also contact your Extension Ag engineer, beef or dairy specialist, your local DNR field office, or your Iowa Cattlemen’s Association for more details.

The Small Feedlot project is supported by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Cattlemen’s Association, Iowa Department of Ag and Land Stewardship, Iowa State Dairy Association, USDA-NRCS, and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, including the Iowa Manure Management Action Group, the Iowa Beef Center and the Iowa Learning Farms.

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