

Confined Animal Feeding Operations supported by US Government

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Confined Animal Feeding Operations Cost Taxpayers Billions, New Report Finds Science Group Calls for Policies that Reduce CAFO Subsidies and Encourage Modern, Sustainable Meat, Milk and Egg Production

WASHINGTON, DC – April 24 – Misguided federal farm policies have encouraged the growth of massive confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, by shifting billions of dollars in environmental, health and economic costs to taxpayers and communities, according to a report released today by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). As a result, CAFOs now produce most of the nation's beef, pork, chicken, dairy and eggs, even though there are more sophisticated and efficient farms in operation.

"CAFOs aren't the natural result of agricultural progress, nor are they the result of rational planning or market forces," said Doug Gurian-Sherman, a senior scientist in UCS's Food and Environment Program and author of the report. "Ill-advised policies created them, and it will take new policies to replace them with more sustainable, environmentally friendly production methods."

"CAFOs Uncovered: The Untold Costs of Confined Animal Feeding Operations" enumerates the policies that have allowed CAFOs to dominate U.S. meat and dairy production. For example, it found that from 1997 to 2005 taxpayer-subsidized grain prices saved CAFOs nearly \$35 billion in animal feed, which comprises a large percentage of their supply costs. Cattle operations that raise animals exclusively on pasture land do not benefit from the subsidy.

(To read the full report, go to:
http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_environment/sustainable_food/cafos-uncovered.html

The report also details how other federal policies give CAFOs hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to address their pollution problems, which stem from the manure

generated by thousands, if not tens of thousands, of animals confined in a small area. The report estimates that CAFOs have received \$100 million in annual pollution prevention payments in recent years through the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which was established by the 2002 Farm Bill.

"If CAFOs were forced to pay for the ripple effects of harm they have caused, they wouldn't be dominating the U.S. meat industry like they are today," said Margaret Mellon, director of UCS's Food and Environment Program. "The good news is that we can institute new policies that support animal production methods that benefit society rather than harm it."

Instead of favoring CAFOs, the report recommends that government policies provide incentives for modern production methods that benefit the environment, public health and rural communities. The report also shows that several smart alternative production methods can offer meat and dairy at costs comparable to CAFO products.

For example, some livestock producers move beef and dairy cattle frequently to different areas of a pasture, enabling them to spread out manure, prevent overgrazing, and take advantage of grass as a cost-effective source of animal feed. Meanwhile, some hog farmers have built hog hoop barns—open-ended structures with curved roofs—as an alternative to confining the animals in cramped buildings.

"Many farmers are succeeding when they work with nature instead of against it," said Gurian-Sherman. "These savvy producers are proving that hog hoop barns, smart pasture operations, and other alternative methods can compete with the massive CAFOs. And that's despite the fact that the cards are stacked against them."

In addition to steering taxpayer dollars away from CAFOs, the report also urges Congress to enforce laws that encourage competition so alternative producers can get their meat and dairy to consumers as easily as CAFOs. Making CAFOs, rather than taxpayers, pay to prevent or clean up the pollution they create is also critical, Gurian-Sherman said.

Mellon noted that next week the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production is expected to issue its final report that documents the effects of intensive animal production on humans, animals, and the environment. "When taken together," she said, "the two reports paint a grim picture of CAFOs and make strong, practical recommendations for new policies that can take us in a new, more efficient direction that will not fleece the American public."

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