

Do you know what AFO means?

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At times we become so focused on issues that we simply miss activities (and sometimes new rules) being advanced in the beef industry. The National Animal Identification System (NAIS) has captured much of our attention. Prior to the NAIS, country-of-origin labeling (COOL), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and a multitude of other marketing or health-related issues provided spirited coffee shop talk. Most of these issues impact the producer and may lead to the modification of the producer's associated business and management practices.

A new issue sleeping in the shadows for many cow-calf producers is waste management. Often perceived as simply a feedlot problem, many cow-calf producers have skimmed the information, setting the material aside for a rainy day. The information eventually gets lost in the stack.

After reviewing much of the information, the Dickinson Research Extension Center (DREC) is applying for a permit from the North Dakota Department of Health for animal feeding. The DREC does affect the environment. We have animals confined for periods more than 45 days during the year and some of these cow-calf lots do not sustain normal forage or crop growth throughout the year.

Bridget Johnson and Ron Wiederholt, area livestock nutrient management specialists for the North Dakota State University Extension Service, developed an assessment tool to help producers get a handle on what impact their livestock operation might have on their local environment. More than likely, most livestock producers, particularly cow-calf producers, are animal-feeding operations as previously defined. Let that be repeated: Most cow-calf producers are animal-feeding operations as defined by the regulations in their respective states.

In large operations, those with more than 1,000 beef cattle, for example, size alone makes the operation a large, concentrated animal-feeding operation (CAFO). However, most producers will fit into either a medium or small animal-feeding operation (AFO) and may or may not need to modify the operation.

It is important for producers to become knowledgeable about animal-feeding operations and ask for an assessment of their operation. Along with university systems, most livestock or producer organizations, such as the North Dakota Stockmen's Association, have information and people to help determine to what extent a beef operation impacts the environment. Medium or small animal-feeding operations, even those with one cow, may need a permit if the operation has a potential impact on the waters of the state.

Like NAIS and COOL, the train is on the tracks and more than likely, as cow-calf producers, we are not the engineer. The regulations are still a year or two away, but there is no need to be caught short.

For the center, like many operations, the early settlers located cattle in protected draws and coulees making winter feeding somewhat more pleasant and calf survival was enhanced. However, for now, many of the winter safe havens are simply conduits within a larger system of water drainage that ultimately affect the major water sources within the state.

As a result, the center is moving cattle around, changing winter-feeding operations, keeping cattle on crop aftermath for longer periods and pulling cattle into more constructed windbreak systems in more exposed landscapes. These management changes create new challenges, including workload, more extensive feeding needs and greater calf death loss. These challenges have all pointed to more questions, but at least for now, the term "animal feeding operation" is taking on a new meaning. Make sure you read the fine print.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com

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Do You Have An Animal Feeding Operation?

An AFO is a lot or facility (other than aquatic animal production) where the following two conditions are met:

- Animals have been, are, or will be stabled or confined and fed or maintained for a total of 45 days or more in any 12-month period
- Crops, vegetation, forage growth or post-harvest residues are not sustained in the normal growing season over any portion of the lot or facility

Source: Assessment Tool for New or Existing Animal Feeding Operations, Bridget Johnson and Ron Wiederholt, Area Livestock Nutrient Management Specialists for the NDSU Extension Service.