

INFORMATION SHEET on CAFOs

- CAFOs = Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations
- A CAFO is a form of industrial agriculture that handles extremely large numbers of livestock – dairy cows, cattle, swine or poultry – that produce, among other things, extremely large volumes of manure.
- In 2001 an estimated 54 percent of U.S. livestock was concentrated on 5 percent of livestock farms nationwide, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- In Ohio, the number of CAFOs has increased dramatically in just six years: from 15 CAFOs in 2002 to 168 CAFOs in 2007.
- Approximately 85 CAFOs exist today in the Maumee River Watershed – a tri-state watershed that includes portions of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. The Maumee River Watershed empties into the western basin of Lake Erie.
- Approximately 23 of the 85 CAFOs in the Maumee River Watershed are dairy CAFOs.
- In Ohio, a single, permitted dairy CAFO has 700 cows or more, and can produce manure in volumes equivalent to the volume of human waste of a small city. A dairy farm with less than 700 cows can also produce large volumes of manure, but needs no state permit.
- Wastewater from humans requires primary, secondary and sometimes tertiary treatment before it is permitted to be discharged into our waterways. Not so with animal wastes. Manure from CAFOs is collected in open-air lagoons and sprayed, *untreated*, as liquid manure onto fields as ‘fertilizer’ and can foul the air as well as ground and surface water.
- CAFOs have proliferated in the name of ‘economic development’ but without regulation and enforcement that protects water resources including Lake Erie.
- Degradation to air and water quality is a serious concern of many groups calling for a moratorium and stricter regulations on CAFOs, including the American Public Health Association, Ohio Farmers Union, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Sierra Club, Ohio Environmental Council, Leagues of Women Voters, as well as townships, villages and counties in Northwest Ohio, to name a few.
- Research seems to suggest that manure runoff is a source of nutrients that may be a factor in Lake Erie’s dead zones, declining fish populations, and harmful algal blooms.