

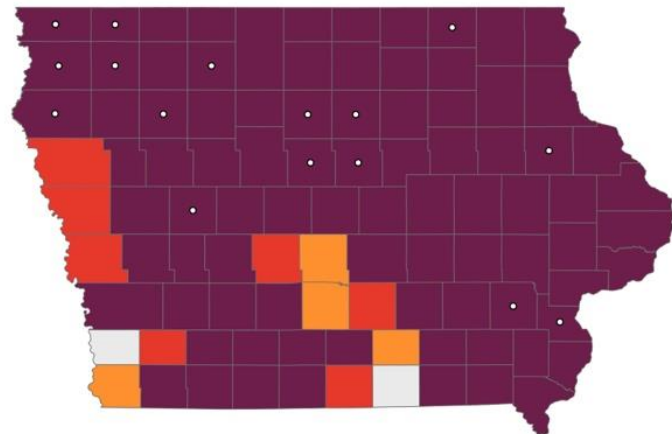
Factory Farm Nation: Iowa's Factory Farm Problem

Iowa is ground zero for factory farms. The state confines one-third of factory-farmed hogs in the U.S. and has more egg-laying hens confined on factory farms than any other state. Together, Iowa's factory farms produce 300 million pounds of manure *each day* — 25 times more than the state's human population.¹ This manure is typically not treated before being dumped into the environment, where it fouls rivers and streams, pollutes drinking water, and fuels climate change.

Meanwhile, state and federal policies and incentives continue to prop up Big Ag's factory farm model at the expense of family-scale operations, which are collapsing in alarming numbers. Iowa must ban new factory farms and the expansion of existing ones, and revamp farm policies to build a food system that works for everyone.

Hogs on Iowa's Factory Farms

HOG DENSITY



Source: Food & Water Watch analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture

Iowa's Factory Hog Farms Pollute Our Water and Worsen Extreme Weather Events

Up until the late 20th century, most hogs were raised on smaller, diversified farms. But significant changes in U.S. farm policy and growing corporate power transformed the way we grow crops and raise livestock, leading to an onslaught of factory hog operations across rural America, and especially Iowa.² And Iowa's factory hog farms continue to expand. In 2022, the average hog factory farm confined 6,868 hogs — twice as many as in 2002.

As each hog produces one-and-a-half tons of manure annually, their combined manure in a county can meet or exceed the equivalent weight in human sewage produced by entire counties or states. In 2022, hogs on factory farms in Washington County, Iowa produced 4.8 billion pounds of manure — 156 times as much the county's human population, and more than all people in Iowa combined. Unlike human sewage, hog and other livestock waste is not typically treated, and is often sprayed on farmland.³ Iowa's factory hog farms can generate more manure than can be sustainably absorbed by nearby fields, contributing to runoff that pollutes soil and water.⁴

In 2021, American Rivers named Iowa's Raccoon River, which receives overflows from hundreds of factory hog operations, one of the country's "Most Endangered Rivers."⁵ Extreme weather events — which are getting stronger and more prevalent in our changing climate⁶ — exacerbate this water pollution. In summer 2024, major flooding in the Midwest caused several manure lagoons to overflow into the environment.⁷

Factory Farms Are Destroying Rural Communities

The factory farm industry likes to claim that it supports rural communities and creates jobs, and to stoke fears about job losses — all while opposing rules and legislation that challenge corporate power.⁸ If these economic benefits were the case, rural Iowa should be brimming with wealth and prosperity. Instead, Iowa serves as a tragic case study in the social and economic harms associated with factory farm expansion.

While factory farms expanded, the state shed its family-scale hog farms (those with fewer than 1,000 head). In 2022, there were fewer than one-third as many family-scale hog farms compared with 2002. A previous Food & Water Watch analysis⁹ found that the Iowa counties that sold the most hogs and had the largest operations experienced declines in real median income and population from 1982 to 2017, as well as losses in wage jobs and local businesses that exceeded the state average. In fact, Iowa had over 40 percent fewer farm jobs in 2017 compared with 1982, with even greater declines in counties with the most hogs sold and the largest hog farms — despite the state collectively selling 2.5 times as many hogs.

A growing body of research similarly links factory farm growth with declines in the economic and social well-being of communities, including higher levels of poverty and economic inequality, increased use of supplemental nutrition assistance, and out-migration.¹⁰

We Can Fix Our Factory Farm Problem

We need a complete overhaul of our federal farm policies so that they work for farmers and consumers — not agribusiness giants — while reducing livestock's climate footprint. This must include:

- An immediate, national ban on new factory farms and on the expansion of existing ones;
- Research and funding to help current factory farms transition to smaller, more sustainable crop and/or livestock systems; and
- Investment to expand local markets and build the infrastructure needed to help farmers bring their products to market.

While we work toward these goals, Iowa must take immediate action by:

- Enacting a moratorium on new and expanding factory farms;
- Passing the Clean Water for Iowa Act, which would ensure that pollution from existing factory farms is regulated; and
- Stopping the expansion of industry scams like factory farm gas, ethanol, and carbon pipelines that only further entrench the factory farm model.

Endnotes

- 1 For methodology, see Food & Water Watch (FWW), "Factory Farm Nation: 2024 Edition." September 2024.
- 2 See FWW. "The Economic Cost of Food Monopolies: The Hog Bosses." May 2022.
- 3 Graham, Jay P. and Keeve E. Nachman. "Managing waste from confined animal feeding operations in the United States: The need for sanitary reform." *Journal of Water and Health*. Vol. 8, No. 4. December 2010 at 649 to 651 and 654.
- 4 Yang, Qichun et al. "Spatiotemporal patterns of livestock manure nutrient production in the conterminous United States from 1930 to 2012." *Science of the Total Environment*. October 2015 at 14 to 20.
- 5 Jones, Chris et al. "The urgent need to address nutrient imbalance problems in Iowa's high-density livestock regions." *Agricultural Policy Review*. Fall 2019 at discussion; Food & Water Action. "American Rivers has named Iowa river 'Most Endangered' in the country." April 13, 2021 at 3.
- 6 Ghazali, Daniel Aiham et al. "Climate change impacts on disaster and emergency medicine focusing on mitigation disruptive effects: An international perspective." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Vol. 15, No. 1379. July 2018 at abstract.
- 7 Stanley, Greg. "Seventeen manure pits reportedly overflow at large feedlots in southern Minnesota." *Star Tribune*. June 26, 2024; Jacobo, Julia. "'Fecal soup' could be lurking in Iowa floodwaters, health experts warn." *ABC News*. June 28, 2024.
- 8 National Pork Producers Council (NPPC). "Pork facts." Available at <https://nppc.org/pork-facts>. Accessed November 2021 and on file with FWW; NPPC. [Press release]. "New economic impact study on livestock rule means rural job losses & higher meat prices." October 21, 2010.
- 9 See FWW (2022).
- 10 Lobao, Linda and Curtis W. Stofferahn. "The community effects of industrialized farming: Social science research and challenges to corporate farming laws." *Agriculture and Human Values*. Vol. 25, Iss. 2. June 2008 at 220 to 221 and 225; Durrenberger, E. Paul and Kendall M. Thu. "The expansion of large scale hog farming in Iowa: The applicability of Goldschmidt's findings fifty years later." *Human Organization*. Vol. 55, No. 4. Winter 1996 at 411 to 412; Lyson, Thomas A. and Rick Welsh. "Agricultural industrialization, anticorporate farming laws, and rural community welfare." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*. Vol. 37, Iss. 8. August 1, 2005 at 1487 to 1488.