Until the mid-1990s, EPA placed little emphasis on and had directed few resources to its animal feeding operations permit program because it gave higher priority to other sources of water pollution. In addition, regulatory exemptions have allowed many large operations to avoid regulation. As a result of these problems, many operations that EPA believes are polluting the nation’s waters remain unregulated.

Implementation of revised regulations raise management and resource challenges for the states and the agency. For example, because the number of animal feeding operations subject to the regulations will increase dramatically, states will need to increase their efforts to identify, permit, and inspect facilities and take appropriate enforcement actions against those in noncompliance. For its part, EPA will need to increase its oversight of state programs to ensure that the new requirements are adopted and implemented. Neither the states nor EPA have determined how they will meet these challenges.

Increased EPA Oversight Will Improve Environmental Program for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

What GAO Found

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What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that EPA

- develop and implement a comprehensive tactical plan that identifies resource requirements and how the agency will carry out its increased oversight responsibilities under the revised program; and

- work with authorized states to develop and implement their own plans that will identify resource needs and how they intend to carry out their increased permitting, inspection, and enforcement responsibilities within specified time frames.

[Image of a concentrated animal feeding operation with caption: Source: USDA.]

A concentrated animal feeding operation is a facility that discharges animal wastes to surface waters under certain conditions and is, therefore, subject to regulation.