CONCENTRATED ANIMAL FEEDING OPERATIONS

EPA Needs More Information and a Clearly Defined Strategy to Protect Air and Water Quality from Pollutants of Concern

What GAO Found

EPA has not assessed the extent to which CAFOs may be impairing human health and the environment because it lacks key data on the amount of pollutants that are being emitted from animal feeding operations.

As a first step in developing air emissions protocols for animal feeding operations, in 2007, a 2-year nationwide air emissions monitoring study, largely funded by industry, was initiated. However, the study may not provide the scientific and statistically valid data that EPA needs to develop air emissions protocols.

Furthermore, EPA has not established a strategy or timetable for developing a more sophisticated process-based model that considers the interaction and implications of all emission sources at an animal feeding operation.

Two recent federal court decisions have affected EPA’s ability to regulate water pollutants discharged by CAFOs. The 2005 Waterkeeper case required EPA to abandon the approach that it had proposed in 2003 for regulating CAFO water discharges. Similarly, the 2006 Rapanos case has complicated EPA’s enforcement of CAFO discharges because EPA believes that it must now gather significantly more evidence to establish which waters are subject to the Clean Water Act’s permitting requirements.

What GAO Recommends

To more effectively regulate CAFOs, GAO recommends that EPA complete its inventory of permitted CAFOs, reassess the current nationwide air emissions monitoring study, and establish a strategy and timetable for developing a process-based model for measuring CAFO air emissions.

EPA partially agreed with GAO’s recommendations.

For more information, contact Anu Mittal (202) 512-3841, mittala@gao.gov.