

Gearing Up For A Changing Livestock Industry

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The environment for livestock production has changed greatly in the past 15-20 years. Production and marketing concerns once were the primary factors in determining the success of livestock farms. Increasingly, perceptions about environmental performance and social impacts, and values that are consistent with those of a non-agricultural public play a major role in deciding the future success of individual operations and the livestock industry in general. Following are management concerns and suggestions that can help producers navigate this new environment.

Site Selection

Consider distance from rural residences, towns, roads and other publicly used places as well as topography and prevailing winds when selecting a site for new facilities. Also give these factors consideration when expanding existing facilities. Don't create a difficult situation for yourself by building or expanding where problems are very likely to occur.

Visual Impacts

Keeping facilities neat, clean, and well organized is consistent with values about food production. Develop landscaping plans that present a positive and attractive image. Design livestock facilities that look like traditional farmsteads for the region and include green areas and grazing livestock to the extent possible.

Compliance

Comply with all regulations. Exceed minimum compliance levels when possible. Be aware and comply with state and county rules for permitting, manure application, manure storage, etc. Responsible behavior is essential to building public trust.

Neighbor Relations

Know and communicate with your neighbors. Recognize their importance to your success. Build personal relationships to the extent possible. Keep them informed about your operation and proposed changes. Take responsibility and corrective action if problems occur. Be an "old fashioned" good neighbor who provides assistance when needed and cares about the well being of neighbors.

Environmental Assessment

Take advantage of an environmental assessment program. Several government agencies and some commodity organizations offer programs that will allow you to assess potential risk areas in your operation and implement corrective and proactive management practices. Most of these programs include assistance from professionals.

Manure Management Plan

Develop a detailed manure management plan that includes individual field details and history. Test for manure nutrient content and calibrate application equipment. Capitalize on the economic value of manure's nutrient content and minimize environmental risk from potential over-application and application in sensitive areas. Keep accurate manure application records. Seek help from Extension Service, NRCS, or private consultants in developing plans.

Odor Management Plan

While a new concept, it's possible to get help in determining areas in your operations where changes in management and facilities may reduce the intensity and frequency of offensive odors to nearby areas.

Community Relations Plan

Consider developing and implementing a community relations plan for your operation. Complete an environmental assessment program and consider any complaints that you have received. Then formulate plans for appropriate management changes, personal communications with neighbors, community involvement, and other activities to improve the performance and image of your operation.

Community Support/Involvement

Be a positive member of your community. Support local activities. Purchase locally when possible. Make your presence felt in a positive way.

Support Livestock Organization Efforts

Encourage and support efforts of county and state livestock groups to tell the positive story of animal agriculture and build the knowledge of the public. This may include hosting tours and speaking to local groups.

Education

Take advantage of opportunities to learn more about environmental issues and environmental management, as well as increasing your awareness and skills in human relations.