

Feedlot flyovers a frustration

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Feeder says operators compliant already

Brian Keiser is disappointed that the Environmental Protection Agency is flying over feedlots to make sure operators are complying with rules.

“It’s scary,” said Keiser, manager of K Farms Inc., a 6,000-head fattening facility and corn and soybean farm. “It means Big Brother is watching.”

Keiser, like several other area cattle feeders, think they are doing their best to follow Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality regulations, passed in 2006 as part of the Clean Water Act, that mandate how to handle such things as manure stockpiling and nutrient management plans.

On July 2, EPA Region 7 staff hosted an informational meeting in Lexington for livestock producers about the agency’s inspection program for concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).

Federal officials say the inspections are part of an increased national emphasis on ending harmful discharges of pollutants from CAFOs into rivers and streams.

Flyover inspections of feedlots began in Nebraska in 2011, according to an article in the Omaha World Herald. The article said the area around Lexington has one of the highest concentrations of livestock feed yards in Nebraska and that EPA officials claim that the central part has a higher concentration of polluted rivers and streams than the rest of the state.

Keiser said feedlot owners already spend thousands of dollars and a lot of time complying with DEQ regulations.

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“We send in volumes of records about rainfall, what we pump off the feedlot and more,” he said. “Then it’s like they don’t trust what we send in and they fly over to see.”

He described the rules as stringent.

“We can’t have a drop leave the feedlot when we pump it off to irrigate and we have to document how much is pumped and when,” he explained, noting that each load of manure and where it goes must be documented.

On top of that, the feedlot manager said fields that receive manure must be tested to make sure nitrogen and phosphorous levels are correct.

“It’s frustrating because we’re spending the time and money to be compliant and they’re flying over and taking pictures,” he said.

Keiser said he understands the regulations because feedlot operators don’t want to be polluters.

“But it makes me feel like a criminal when they fly over to check on us,” he said.

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