

OPPOSE SB371

SB371 would remove a requirement for new concentrated animal feeding operations (or CAFOs for short) to obtain a general discharge permit before starting construction. This permit is issued by the Maryland Department of Environment and sets limits on the amount of pollution a factory farm is allowed to discharge into state waters. If CAFOs are allowed to build before having legal protections in place to prevent pollution of our waterways, the permits become a forgone conclusion, meaning even less accountability for factory farms that violate the law. It would be like building a house without knowing whether it will be up to code, then trying to retroactively address code violations.

We know this is true because it happened with the infamous Lost Valley Ranch in eastern Oregon: they were allowed to build before getting their water discharge permit, and went on to violate that permit over 200 times (due in large part to their faulty infrastructure). It took the state hundreds of inspector and enforcer hours to shut the facility down.

Without proper safeguards, factory farm pollution threatens the water we all depend on. CAFOs generate massive amounts of waste, including manure mixed with heavy metals, pharmaceuticals, and other contaminants. Many operations store this waste in open cesspools called "lagoons" and spray it onto fields. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus from these discharges can cause algae blooms that lead to "dead zones" where oxygen levels are too low to sustain most life.

By waiting until after construction on a CAFO starts to issue a permit, a big problem is created: if the CAFO in question finishes construction, but builds faulty infrastructure, the state is less likely to make them fix it before approving a permit as opposed to requiring correct manure management infrastructure in the first place.

There's no reason to roll back this commonsense regulation that protects our waterways from pollution besides making it easier for new factory farms to open and pollute our shared environment. Please vote unfavorably.

Sincerely,
Mark Meyerovich
District 15