

# MISSOURI NEWS SCENE

**POSITIVE OR** negative? There's growing debate over trends in animal agriculture toward larger, more concentrated operations. The Department of Natural Resources has issued 461 concentrated animal feeding operation permits in Missouri.



# Health ordinances, CAFOs create debate

By **JERILYN JOHNSON**

**C**HUCK Wood scans the crowded courtroom, searching for answers on the faces of fellow citizens and farmers. The Shelby County commissioner is presiding over a public hearing on whether or not his county should impose a health ordinance to curtail concentrated animal feeding operations. The Jan. 6 hearing at the courthouse in Shelbyville has attracted a capacity crowd — the largest since 1988, when reassessment of property taxes lit a fire under citizens.

“We thought it was important to look

### Key Points

- County health ordinances for CAFOs become a sensitive political issue.
- Commissioners in Shelby County are latest to examine ordinance option.
- Debate about state vs. local government control of CAFOs heats up.

at this health ordinance option,” Wood says. “Shelby County does not want to get in the business of being a limiting factor in the growth of CAFOs. But this hearing shows just how important local input is — why it’s important to keep local government control.”



**A LARGE**, modern dairy operation can fill a tanker truck with milk every day. These dairies, as well as large swine and poultry farms, could be subject to more CAFO regulations and public scrutiny in the future.

Wood and the other two commissioners are in the middle of a sensitive political issue. It’s an issue that has been brewing across the state over the past year and threatens to divide the agriculture industry.

Large swine and poultry farms have been the focus of heated debate for more than a decade. Opponents voice concern that they are a threat to the environment and public health and a stinky nuisance to neighbors. Starting in 1997, a few Missouri counties went as far as to pass county health ordinances. The ordinances discourage CAFOs by imposing tougher restrictions, such as increased buffer distances, high operating fees and six-figure surety bonds.

Linn County’s ordinance, for example, requires a 7,000-animal unit to be set back 17,160 feet from the nearest dwelling; the Missouri Department of Natural Resources requires only 2,000 feet. Linn County charges \$10,000 per year for its health permit, compared with \$50 per year charged by DNR. Linn County also requires a 7,000-AU or more CAFO to post a \$270,000 bond. State law requires large CAFOs to pay \$700 per year for deposit into the CAFO Indemnity Fund (abandoned lagoon closure fund).

As of early January, a total of 12 counties in Missouri had county health ordinances. They are Adair, Caldwell, Camden, Harrison, Henry, Linn, Livingston, Macon, Pettis, Platte, Schuyler and Scotland. (See map on

next page.) Nine townships and two counties have enacted zoning restrictions affecting CAFOs. At least four more counties besides Shelby are considering health ordinances: Newton and Jasper counties in the southwest, and Lewis and Clark counties in the northeast.

### State vs. local control

The state legislation referred to and feared by proponents of county health ordinances last year was Sen. John Cauthorn’s SB 187. Cauthorn, R-Mexico, proposed legislation that would have made it more difficult for counties to impose restrictive ordinances on CAFOs. It became the House compromise bill, HCS/SB 187, and received the backing of Missouri’s major agricultural commodity groups.

The Missouri Pork Association was one supporter of the legislation. “We are opposed to regulations that are not based on sound peer-reviewed science,” says Don Nikodim, MPA executive vice president.

The Missouri Corn Growers Association sent a letter last fall to county commissioners in the northeast and southwest regions to express growing concern about county health ordinances for the purpose of restricting local livestock production. “County health ordinances are not a clear-cut solution to preventing large-scale livestock production from becoming established in an area and often place a