

## **Impact of AFO AND CAFO REGULATIONS on the Equine Industry**

By Jamie Cohen Wallace for ELCR

In recent years, Best Management Practices (BMPs) have essentially become standard for horse farms/facilities across the country. Meant to protect the ground and surface waters, BMPs are excellent management practices that should be utilized by every horse farm and facility to stay in compliance, regardless of legislation.

In fact, [even horse trail systems](#) are now starting to be legislated, and/or stopped. Certainly, small amounts of manure on trails and farms won't have negative impacts, but in significant, concentrated amounts, excess nutrients have the potential to be harmful to our environment and water. Using BMPs in all management decisions, both on and off the trails, helps to protect against these excess nutrients from entering into our ground and surface waters as well as keep you ahead of legislation.

These nutrient rulings vary substantially for horse facilities, depending on size (ranging from an Olympic Venue to a backyard farm), location, horse population, and area of the country. The size of an operation is a great determining factor in the amount of legislation. In fact, horse show venues and racetracks are so large that they fall into their own legislated category. Those found not to be in compliance can result in very costly fines levied to them, and include excessive paperwork and construction requirements.

How can you be sure that the show venue, racetrack, etc. that you own, manage, or simply attend, is meeting regulations and in compliance with these more stringent, or different regulations? And what about your own farm?

Many/most horse show venues and racetracks are considered to be a CAFO, or Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation. A CAFO, regardless of animal species, has such a large, concentrated population of animals that their abilities to potentially pollute is much greater than that of a family farm, having only one or a few animals.

Smaller animal operations are known as AFOs, Animal Feeding Operations, as they lack "concentrated" animal populations. Your farm or boarding facility is an AFO. County legislation normally determines where legislation lies with family farms and boarding facilities. For CAFOs, regulations are set on a federal level and are also done for many species (cattle, swine, horses etc).



*Ideal AFO manure containment system built on a family farm with 8-12 horses on the property. Photo credit: Jamie Cohen.*



*Ideal CAFO manure containment system taken at a CAFO racehorse facility in Ocala, FL. Photo credit: Jamie Cohen*

defined as 500 or more being a LARGE CAFO, 150-499 are MEDIUM CAFOs and fewer than 150 horses is considered to be a SMALL CAFO.

As defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a "CAFO is another EPA term for a large concentrated AFO. A CAFO is an AFO with more than 1000 animal units (an animal unit is defined as an animal equivalent of 1000 pounds live weight and equates to 1000 head of beef cattle, 700 dairy cows, 2500 swine weighing more than 55 lbs, 125 thousand broiler chickens, or 82 thousand laying hens or pullets) confined on site for more than 45 days during the year. Any size AFO that discharges manure or wastewater into a natural or man-made ditch, stream or other waterway is defined as a CAFO, regardless of size." For a horse operation, a CAFO has three size designations,

The *Producers' Compliance Guide for CAFOs* (<https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-06/documents/compliance-cafos.pdf>) is an outstanding publication created by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which provides information on all CAFOs and answers "how and why" these regulations came to be passed. At least 500 horses are fairly common for many horse shows, so these more stringent federal CAFO guidelines come into play. This publication also clearly explains horse size category thresholds that legislate where the horse show or race track fall within those threshold ranges.

Where does one learn about CAFO regulations to be sure that a horse show is compliant with local, state and federal regulations and to understand the most current legislation? A great first step is to check your local Extension office. This can be found by doing a Google search for your county and state, along with the word "Extension." As an example, a Google search for "Marion County, Florida Extension" brings the following result: <https://www.marioncountyfl.org/departments-agencies/departments-a-n/extension-service>.

The Extension Service does an excellent job sending you to the appropriate regulatory office. In areas where horses are very present, the local county Extension office may already have programming and information specific to AFOs, CAFOs and local and state federal manure rulings. Nationally, Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) provides many wonderful links to information such as [BMP's](#), [manure on trails](#), education on the benefits of [horses in our communities](#), etc.

The good news is that CAFO legislation, now quite stringent and garnering heavy regulatory fines, is largely being followed closely by all horse CAFOs. So much progress has been made, with all now aware of needing to be alert to issues of water pollution while still making a living, and the vast majority are doing their best to protect our water and environment in order to preserve and continue the many wonderful benefits of the equine industry.

*About the author: Jamie (Cohen) Wallace has degrees in Journalism/Advertising and Animal Science. Between 2007-2016, she solely conceptualized, marketed and developed a successful water quality/natural resources education/outreach program for University of Florida/IFAS Marion County Extension. This included educating horse farm owners/managers on best management practices (BMPs), manure to energy and composting, producing national conferences and publishing monthly articles and columns.*