

SWINE GENERAL PERMITS FACT SHEET

Background on Hog Production in North Carolina:

- There are over 2,000 large hog operations in North Carolina. Most of these industrial farms are located in eastern North Carolina, and disproportionately in Black, Latino, Native American, and low-wealth communities.
- Large hog operations in North Carolina produce billions of gallons of hog waste every year. To dispose of this waste, these operations store the raw urine and feces in open-air pits and then spray the waste on nearby fields. This practice is known as the “lagoon and sprayfield system.”
- Lagoon and sprayfield systems pollute water and air. Families living near lagoon and sprayfield systems get sick and die at higher rates than people living further away.

Background on the Swine General Permit Program:

- Any hog farm with over 250 hogs must have a permit from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (“DEQ”). Most of these operations are covered by the state’s **Swine Waste General Permit** or **Swine Digester General Permit**. These general permits tell large hog operations how they must handle and dispose of their hog waste.
- The swine waste general permit and digester general permit allow lagoon and sprayfield systems to dispose of hog waste.
- Every 5 years, DEQ renews the state’s swine general permits. The swine waste general permit was last renewed in 2019. The swine digester general permit was first issued in 2022. Both the swine waste general permit and swine digester general permit will be renewed in 2024. The general permits won’t be renewed again until 2029.

What is Biogas?

- Biogas is produced by covering a hog waste lagoon with a “digester” system. Digesters change the chemical makeup of the waste in the lagoon to produce more methane and capture the methane and other gases: this gas is called “biogas.”
- The biogas can then be trucked or piped away and put into the natural gas pipeline or burned for electricity. However, biogas is often “vented” or “flared,” releasing potent greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and harming air quality. Digesters and pipelines transporting biogas can also leak methane.
- Once biogas is captured and removed, chemically changed hog waste (also called digester waste) is pumped into an open-air pit and then spread on fields. This digester waste is more harmful than waste from a lagoon without a digester or cover.
- The swine digester general permit regulates how hog operations that produce “biogas” handle their waste.

SWINE GENERAL PERMIT TALKING POINTS

DEQ should ensure equity in its animal waste permitting program.

- DEQ must protect the environment and health of everyone that lives near polluting hog operations.
- DEQ's own environmental justice report shows that, people of color and low-wealth people bear the burden of pollution from large scale hog operations: worse air quality, dirtier water, and poorer health.
- Under federal civil rights law, DEQ must prevent or ease the environmental and health harms that industrial hog farms have in communities of color. In addition, DEQ must consider the collective harms from all nearby sources of pollution before issuing permits.

DEQ should require better, cleaner technology on industrial hog farms.

- Require that safe technology be used to dispose of hog waste.
- Require liners on all waste lagoons.

DEQ should require reporting and more public notice.

- Continue to require annual reporting.
- Require farm operators to more promptly notify the public whenever their hog waste spills into rivers and streams.
- Require water quality testing within 24-hours of hog waste spilling into rivers and streams.

DEQ should require more monitoring and testing.

- Require groundwater monitoring:
 - Whenever hog waste is stored or sprayed in the 500-year floodplain,
 - Near hog burial sites, and
 - At all farms producing "biogas."
- Require soil testing for more pollutants (like nitrates and bacteria) in sprayfields.
- Require all operations monitor for excess phosphorus and harmful nutrient pollution.