



Media Contact: Cecelia Brackey
cbrackey@iatp.org, 612-870-0453x3001

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MINNESOTA'S CLIMATE REPORT SHOWS OVERALL PROGRESS, BUT NEED TO REDUCE AGRICULTURE EMISSIONS

Agriculture emissions tied to growing large-scale animal operations and fertilizer use

MINNEAPOLIS—New greenhouse gas emissions data released today by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) show the state is making progress toward its climate targets, aided by the pandemic, but agriculture emissions continue to be a major contributor. According to the [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](https://www.iatp.org) (IATP)'s analysis, the state's data on agriculture point to emissions tied to large-scale animal operations, primarily big dairy and hog operations, and rising use of nitrogen fertilizer.

The new data found that from 2005-2020, the state's overall emissions declined by 23%, although the MPCA was cautious about whether recent declines linked to pandemic disruptions would continue. Agriculture, along with forestry, is the state's second largest source of emissions. While the emissions from electricity (-54%) and transportation (-18%) sectors have declined significantly, agriculture's emissions have remained flat since 2005 — with a slow rise in recent years.

"The state's agriculture emissions continue to be significant, and that's largely due to the growth of very large-scale dairy and hog operations and their manure management, as well as from heavy use of nitrogen fertilizer to produce animal feed and ethanol," said Ben Lilliston, director of climate and rural strategies at IATP. "We have a tight 2030 timeline set by the Governor's climate framework to reduce emissions by 50%. To meet our climate targets, we need to invest in more climate-resilient regenerative farming systems and start setting emissions limits on the biggest dairy and hog operations."

The state's new data show that agriculture is Minnesota's largest source of the potent GHG methane due to ruminants (primarily cattle) and manure. Methane emissions from animal agriculture have risen 10% since 2005, tied to the growth in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in the state. Agriculture also accounts for much of the state's nitrous oxide emissions, another potent GHG. Nitrous oxide emissions rose 9% since 2005 largely due to the rising use of nitrogen fertilizers (often used to produce corn for ethanol and animal feed).

Last year, the state's Environmental Quality Board approved environmental review requirements for major project developers, including new or expanding CAFOs, to report projected climate emissions and adaptation strategies. Those requirements will provide additional climate-related information for the developers, the public and policymakers.

"Climate change is already causing disruptions to Minnesota's agriculture system, including drought conditions last year," said Lilliston. "There is enormous interest from Minnesota's farmers in accessing conservation programs that help reduce emissions and strengthen resilience by diversifying cropping systems and reviving pasture-based systems, but many farmers who apply are often turned away due to lack of program resources. Phasing in limits on CAFOs, combined with expanding conservation programs and other agriculture infrastructure investments, should be part of a climate transition to meet the state's emission reduction targets."

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Based in Minneapolis with offices in Washington, D.C. and Berlin, Germany, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. To learn more, visit: www.iatp.org.