

Farm odor rules to begin

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HARRISBURG — New state odor regulations will take effect next week, aimed at keeping the peace between big farms and their neighbors.

The rules, to go into play on Feb. 27, will force farms known as CAFOs, or concentrated animal-feeding operations — factory farms, in common parlance — to get state approval for an odor-management plan for a new or expanded barn or manure-storage facility. The regulations will not affect existing farm buildings.

The new rules are especially important with increasing sprawl in farm communities, state Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff said.

“These new regulations are geared to help minimize conflict between those not accustomed to farm odors and the agricultural producers working to meet our increasing world food needs,” he said in a news release.

The regulation will require new or expanding CAFOs to submit a plan to the state from a certified odor-management specialist. The State Conservation Commission will review and decide whether to approve each plan.

If a project is likely to affect the farm’s neighbors, the plan must include strategies for managing the odor, such as a sanitation regimen, ventilation system or composting plan.

The regulations are backed by the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, a farm advocacy group, but individual farmers have differing opinions.

Lebanon County farmer Bonnie Wenger, co-owner with husband Steve and his father, Glenn, of Wen-Crest Farms in South Lebanon Township,

said she’s concerned about how much the rules will cost farmers. She also questioned whether the new rules will result in meaningful changes, saying many farmers don’t want to offend their neighbors.

Steve Wenger said Wen-Crest raises about a half-million turkeys a year for New Oxford LLC, totaling between 8 and 8.5 million pounds of meat.

“It’s definitely an issue,” Bonnie said. “It’s going to mean more cost to the farmer in the end.”

The Farm Bureau worked with state officials to draft the regulations in a way that does not present a major burden for farmers, bureau spokesman Mark O’Neill said. The management plan will cost about \$1,200, not including fans and ventilation systems.

“We know it’s going to cost a little more, but we feel it was important to take a good-neighbor approach,” O’Neill said.

The regulations were called for in a 2005 law dubbed ACRE, and state officials have been working on drafting and finalizing them since then.