

Vote YES on Measure J

Here's Why...

What is Measure J?

[Measure J](#) is a carefully written, simple, and moderate measure that limits the number of animals that can be confined in one facility by prohibiting large [Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations](#) (CAFOs) in Sonoma County. Measure J conservatively uses the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [definition](#) of CAFOs. Measure J is only a few pages long and easy to read. Anyone who takes a position on Measure J should actually read it before they do.¹

What is a CAFO?

CAFOs are intensive animal agriculture operations in which large numbers of animals are confined and where a large amount of waste is created. The EPA created and defined this term to classify farms that pose a risk of water pollution. There are two size categories of CAFOs, medium and large. A medium CAFO must contain the medium size range of animals [listed by the EPA](#) and *also* directly discharge animal waste into surface water. Farms in Sonoma County are not allowed to discharge animal waste into surface water and there is no record of any medium range operation that is in violation. So measure J only applies to large CAFOs. A large CAFO, [as defined by USEPA](#), confines more than 125,000 chickens raised for meat, more than 82,000 egg-laying hens, or more than 700 mature dairy cows.

Why are CAFOs bad?

- **Risks to Public Health** – CAFOs pose a serious risk to public health because they provide a perfect breeding ground for diseases to develop and spread. Highly pathogenic [Avian Flu](#) which has jumped from birds to mammals including cows and humans, is a significant public health threat. Testing at Sonoma County CAFOs has found dangerous pathogens including antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Measure J will help protect public health.
- **Water Pollution from large CAFOs** – Large CAFOs are major polluters. Waste from CAFOs is often stored in open pits, leading to water pollution and threatening wildlife. Nearly every stream and river in Sonoma County is impaired by nitrogen or phosphorus, of which animal waste from CAFOs is a primary source. Measure J will protect vital watersheds like the Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek.
- **Treatment of animals** – CAFOs treat animals as production units, not as sentient creatures, in order to maximize profits. This often leads to overcrowding, spread of disease, and other problems, even with existing regulations. Investigations into several large Sonoma County CAFOs have found inhumane treatment of animals. Criminal animal cruelty has been documented, including by Sonoma County's [Animal Services Department](#). Footage taken at large CAFOs shows sick and injured chickens and ducks unable to walk to food and water.

Who is funding the support and the opposition?

It is a valid exercise to evaluate the organizations and individuals that stand in support or opposition of any ballot initiative. However, your decision about how to vote on J should be more about what's actually in it, not so much about who is for or against it.

¹ Item #10 at <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6666022&GUID=E2194147-3738-41BB-8B8B-49DE31E10F4D>

- **Support** – Opponents point to [Direct Action Everywhere](#) as the main sponsor and that because a voter disagrees with that organizations’ mission or because they are not based in Sonoma County, you should vote no. But Direct Action Everywhere is just one sponsor among many organizations and businesses, many based in Sonoma County, that support J as part of the [Coalition to End Factory Farming](#).
- **Opposition** – On the opposition side, the deep-pocket Big Ag-supporting [Sonoma County Farm Bureau](#), [Western United Dairies](#) (Central Valley-based), [Agricultural Council of California](#) (Sacramento-based), are all on the list of backers and they are not all based in Sonoma County. The [California Cattle Council](#) (Sacramento-based) is providing indirect support with radio ads targeting Sonoma County. It is unlikely that most voters in Sonoma County agree in full with the missions of these large agribusiness defenders.

Again, don’t shoot or applaud the messenger, make your decision based on the content of the measure and what it will do.

How many farms and ranches will be directly impacted by Measure J?

There are an estimated [21 large CAFOs](#) in Sonoma County that will be affected. No small or medium size farms or ranches will be directly affected. The large CAFOs effectively market themselves as small family farms, but the reality is that these 21 facilities meet the federal definition of a large CAFO and together confine around 3 million animals. Much of the rhetoric in opposition to Measure J evokes imagery of small family farms being shut down. The reality is that small family farms will be *protected* by Measure J.

How are small and medium sized farms protected by Measure J?

Large CAFOs, in some cases owned and operated by large out-of-county corporations, a few owned by local inter-generational dynasties, have grown in rural areas of Sonoma County with giant, windowless animal warehouses. It is difficult for small family farms to compete with these industrial farming operations because the large CAFOs externalize their costs onto animals, society, and the environment. Smaller local farmers have been driven out of business and residents have lost the benefits of quality food and a truly sustainable local economy. Measure J will help protect and restore the local diverse agriculture that existed in Sonoma County before the rise of the large CAFOs.

Sonoma County Economic Development Board – significantly flawed and incorrect

The opponents of Measure J often point to an economic assessment² produced by the Sonoma County Economic Development Board (EDB). The report finds a total of only 11 Large CAFOs that will be directly affected by Measure J, but then based their calculations on a scenario of a total loss of *all* livestock and poultry production in Sonoma County to make the alarming assertion of “losses in agricultural products of \$259 million, and reductions in spending through the region of \$38 million, in addition to a significant loss of labor income and employment.”³ There will undoubtedly be some impact to the Sonoma County economy from Measure J, but any negative impacts will be a small fraction of what the EDB report asserts. In addition, the EDB report failed to consider potential economic benefits from the improved competitive market for medium and small farms and publicity of a CAFO-free Sonoma County.

² See item #5: <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6666022&GUID=E2194147-3738-41BB-8B8B-49DE31E10F4D>

³ Sebastopol Council Agenda packet Item # 8, pages 45-48:

<https://www.cityofsebastopol.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Agenda-Item-Number-8-Resolution-of-Opposition-to-Measure-J.pdf>

Does Measure J really “shut down” family farms?

No, it does not. This is misleading opposition rhetoric that was formulated in the interest of defending Big Ag. Large CAFOs will be deemed “nonconforming” facilities and will be given three years to modify their operations. After that, they will be fined until they can come into compliance. In the event that an operation needs to modify or cease operations resulting in worker layoffs, Measure J includes a provision that requires the county to provide a retraining and employment assistance program for people formerly employed at large CAFOs. This will help ensure that they receive the training needed to work at another agricultural operation or in a different job sector.

Who opposes CAFOs?

Click on the hyperlinks to see these trusted organizations’ positions on CAFOs: [Food & Water Watch](#), the [Sierra Club](#), [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#), and [American Public Health Association](#). They all support policies to stop CAFOs, and [public polling](#) shows overwhelming support for prohibiting new CAFOs.

What about Prop 12?

[Proposition 12](#) was approved by the voters in 2018 and significantly improved caging requirements for some animals, but Prop 12 is limited in scope. It got rid of cages and crates for some animals used in the food system but it is still allowed to cram tens of thousands of animals into one big shed and call it cage free. There have been multiple investigations into factory farms in Sonoma County before and after Prop 12 which found violations of animal cruelty/welfare laws. Simply put, Prop 12 doesn't go far enough. It took egg layers out of battery cages, veal calves out of crates, and mother pigs out of gestation crates. This was a bare minimum anti-cruelty measure and the Farm Bureau and Big Ag lobby rallied hard against it.

What about other regulations? Regulatory agencies have failed to protect animals, the environment, and public health. They typically only give minor penalties, if any at all, when powerful factory farms pollute communities or spread disease. Whistleblowers have documented criminal animal abuse and dangerous, unhygienic conditions in Sonoma County CAFOs on dozens of occasions. They have reported this to local and state authorities, but no action has been taken. The legislature has shown time and time again that they are unwilling to confront this powerful industry, but with a ballot measure, citizens can directly vote to change the law. Let’s do this in Sonoma County.

Vote YES on Measure J

Vote yes on Measure J to stop the spread of large CAFOs, advance the humane treatment of animals, protect local water quality, safeguard public health, and support smaller and medium-sized farms and ranches.