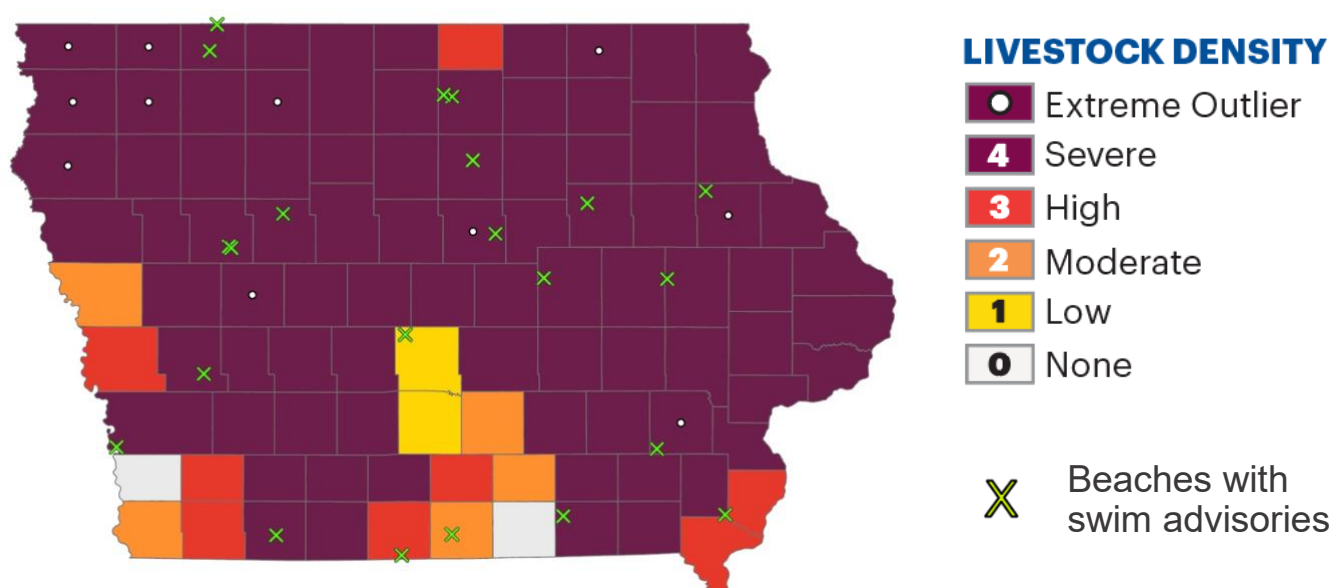


Swimming in Manure: Mapping Iowa's Beach Advisories

Summer should be about enjoying the outdoors and relaxing by the water—not worrying about whether your family is swimming in fecal matter. But this is the reality for many Iowans. Iowa's factory farms produce 109 billion pounds of manure each year—25 times as much as the state's human population. But barely any of that waste is regulated. More than 4,000 factory farms currently operate in Iowa without any water pollution oversight.



Food & Water Watch mapped state park beaches with Iowa Department of Natural Resources swim advisories from Memorial Day through July 31, 2026 on top of our comprehensive Factory Farm Map, displaying factory farmed livestock density. We found that:

- Fifty-six percent of beaches tested (23 of 41) have had at least one swim advisory.
- The overwhelming majority of beach advisories—85%—are in counties with the most extreme densities of factory farmed animals in the country. Meanwhile, the only tested Iowa beach in a county without factory farms—Honey Creek Beach in Appanoose County—has had zero swim advisories.
- Iowa's Department of Natural Resources issued a total of 105 beach advisories so far this summer. Nearly all are for exceeding *E. coli* standards. *E. coli* in water samples indicates fecal contamination, including from nearby livestock facilities.
- The remaining beach advisories were due to algal toxins, or a combination of *E. coli* and algal toxins. Algal blooms are also caused by agricultural runoff, including nitrogen and phosphorus from both synthetic fertilizers and factory farm manure.

Even if Iowans avoid these polluted beaches, the state still swims in factory farm waste. Iowa confines more animals on factory farms than any other US state. Iowans pay the price in cancelled lake trips, lost tourism revenue, polluted drinking water, and toxic air pollution.

Iowans need state legislators to take up the mantle of clean water. Food & Water Watch urges the Iowa legislature to bring forth legislation that finally enacts desperately needed regulations around best management practices, transparency, and accountability to address Iowa's worsening water crisis.

Methodology

Food & Water Watch mapped Iowa state park beaches with reported swim advisories, using the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Beach Monitoring database.¹ Samples are taken weekly from Memorial Day to Labor Day and tested for the presence of *E. coli* and algal toxins.

We pulled the data on July 31, 2026, which include sample results for the first 11 weeks of summer. We excluded from our analysis any beaches that lacked sampling (due, for example, to ongoing construction work). We mapped all beaches with at least one sample resulting in "Swimming Not Recommended" status.

The livestock density layer comes from our 2024 Factory Farm Maps.² The maps display densities of factory-farmed livestock in each US county and across five animal categories (beef cattle on feed, dairy cows, hogs, broiler chickens, and laying hens), as well as an "All Livestock" category. We used the All Livestock layer for this map, which combines the five livestock categories into one by first converting livestock numbers into animal units, a weight-based measurement. The layer uses data from the 2022 Census of Agriculture. For more on our factory farm map methodology, see our 2024 report.³

Endnotes

1 "Beach Monitoring," Iowa Department of Natural Resources, <https://programs.iowadnr.gov/aquia/beaches>.

2 "Factory Farm Map, 2024 Edition," Food & Water Watch, <https://foodandwater.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/filtergallery/index.html?appid=571800658574445b9295f1aa8817e8aa>.

3 *Factory Farm Nation: 2024 Edition* (Food & Water Watch, 2024).