

State: Proposed changes to FSSA will be legal

By **KEN KUSMER**
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

The state has assured federal food stamp officials that it has a contingency plan if its outsourcing of about 1,500 welfare case workers to a team of private vendors next month does not go as planned, but advocates remain wary.

Zach Main, a top official in the Family and Social Services Administration, sent the U.S. Agriculture Department 125 pages of documents Tuesday trying to answer the agency's questions about the privatization before a key step occurs March 19. That's when about 1,500 FSSA case work-

AT A GLANCE

What's new: The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration has sent a 125-page response to the U.S. Agriculture Department. It includes questions about the state's plan to outsource about 1,500 welfare case workers to an IBM Corp.-led coalition.

Why it matters: USDA administrators are due to leave their state jobs and join the team of vendors led by IBM Corp.

Under a 10-year, \$1.16 billion contract that Gov. Mitch Daniels signed with IBM, Indiana is attempting a sweeping outsourcing of the application process for food stamps, Medicaid and other welfare benefits that it has cap-

the federal food stamp program that enrolls about 600,000 Indiana residents and pays part of the state's administrative costs for the program.

What's next: About 1,500 state case workers are due to begin working March 19 for IBM partner Affiliated Computer Services Inc.

tured the attention of policymakers in Washington and advocates for clients nationwide. A similar plan in Texas went awry last year. That state cut the contract by nearly half and tried to hire back former state workers.

"Testing is something that we take seriously," Main, director of the FSSA's Division of Family

Resources, said. "We're going to know during the pilot whether this works or not."

The pilot is a test period scheduled to begin Sept. 10 in a 12-county region surrounding Grant County and affecting about 10 percent of the state's total welfare caseload.

If all goes as planned, the pilot will last three months before the rollout proceeds in three additional stages about two months apart before the IBM team is processing all welfare applications by May 30, 2008.

Even though the USDA, which administers the food stamp program, gave its approval to Indiana's plan in December, the agency's regional administrator

in Chicago, Ollice Holden, sent the FSSA a three-page letter Feb. 8 requesting answers to eight questions. The issues included the contingency plan, state and vendor staffing and safeguards for Indiana's approximately 600,000 food stamp recipients.

The FSSA's response to Holden's request for contingency plan details says the state alone has the authority to halt the transition if it feels such a step is warranted.

"Should this authority be exercised, the Vendor will continue to provide service at that level until the issue is resolved. Once the issue is satisfactorily resolved, the transition will be resumed," FSSA's response said.

"Testing is something that we take seriously. We're going to know during the pilot whether this works or not."

Zach Main

Director of FSSA's Division of Family Resources on the state's plan to outsource about 1,500 welfare case workers to an IBM Corp.-led coalition

Law would limit livestock placement

Lawmaker: Support growing for guidelines to restrict large animal farms

By **RICK CALLAHAN**
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

An Indiana lawmaker sponsoring a bill that calls for large livestock farms to be built no closer than a mile from schools, cities, towns or nursing homes said Thursday that there was growing support across the state for such restrictions.

Rep. Phillip Pflum, D-Milton, said Thursday that he hopes it finds bipartisan support in the Senate even though it is strongly opposed by the livestock industry.

His bill passed the Democratic-controlled House 62-36 Wednesday night, with 12 Republicans voting for it.

Pflum said there is strong support in Indiana's rural areas for new restrictions on large livestock farms, where thousands of hogs, cattle and other animals are raised in tight quarters, producing large amounts of manure waste.

Among other worries, residents near such farms are concerned that their property values will plummet because of the smell, dust and heavy traffic from trucks hauling livestock. Others

"To have a universal number is not necessarily unfair. We're very open to the negotiations and we look forward to working out a reasonable compromise."

Don Villwock

Indiana Farm Bureau president on a proposed bill that calls for large livestock farms to be built at least a mile away from schools, cities, towns or nursing homes

worry their health could be compromised.

"If you try to put one of these next to a small town or a city, people are just outraged. The point of this bill and the other ones out there is to send a message to these big corporate farms to be a little more respectful of people's property," Pflum said.

His bill is one of several the General Assembly is considering that target the industry.

Originally, his bill called for the state's confined feeding operations, or to not be built within 2 miles of a school, city, town, licensed child care center or health facility.

But Pflum said he had to relent and reduce that buffer zone to 1 mile because livestock producers called it too restrictive and said it would hurt the industry.

Indiana Farm Bureau President Don Villwock said Thursday the group is opposed to a uniform setback rule for all confined feeding operations, and their larger counterparts, which are called concentrated animal feeding operations.

He said several factors should be taken into consideration, including the direction of prevailing winds, to determine a farm's location.

"To have a universal number is not necessarily fair," he said. "We're very open to the negotiations on this and we look forward to working out a reasonable compromise."

Pflum's amended bill includes provisions similar to those in legislation sponsored by Sen. Beverly Gard, R-Greenfield, that was advancing in the Republican-ruled Senate.

The version of Pflum's bill that passed the House includes exemptions for some farms.

It would permit new farm construction if a city, town or other entity is already located within a mile of another farm. It would allow expansion of an existing confined feeding operation within the 1-mile setback, but both exemptions would apply only to farms free of environmental violations.

Pflum's bill also would direct state environmental officials to inspect each of Indiana's roughly 2,200 confined feeding operations at least once a year.

To help fund those inspections, it would require the owners of confined feeding operations to pay an annual fee of \$500, and for concentrated animal feeding operation owners to pay a \$750 annual fee.

In addition, it would require state environmental officials to create civil penalty schedules for various types of livestock farm violations.

It also would make the state Chemist's Office set up a training program for farm workers who apply livestock waste to farmland as fertilizer — the most common method of disposing of the large amounts of manure the farms generate.

AT THE STATEHOUSE

House Democrats seek votes needed for budget

Majority House Democrats were looking Thursday for at least one more vote for the two-year state budget bill they drafted with just a few days left before the deadline they set for approving measures and sending them to the Republican-ruled Senate.

Democrats control the chamber 51-49, but it was clear they lacked 51 votes on their own to pass the plan. That meant they needed to either shore up total support from within their own caucus or get help from Republicans to advance the bill — the only legislation lawmakers must pass this session.

Democrats have at least until Monday to pass the bill and send it to the Republican-controlled Senate. They set that as the deadline for passing bills and moving them to the Senate, although it was possible the deadline could be moved back.

But it was clear that Democrats were eager to get the budget bill out of the way and move on to other matters. Thursday was initially the deadline for amending bills, but it seemed likely that deadline would be moved back because House members had spent all day dealing with bills that already had cleared the amendment stage.

It appeared that winning any GOP support for the budget without accepting some major changes sought by Republicans would be difficult. They accepted one minor GOP amendment to the plan on Wednesday, but rejected numerous other proposals to alter the plan.

Company trimming retiree benefits

The Associated Press

ANDERSON

Guide Corp. plans to terminate medical and life benefits for retirees and former salaried employees next month, according letters mailed last week.

The company sent a letter dated Feb. 14 that told people the benefits will end March 17, according to a copy obtained by The (Anderson) Herald Bulletin.

Salaried employees will be eligible for a one-time cash benefit termination settlement upon agreement of the terms listed in the documents, according to the form. The amount of payment will depend on years of service with General Motors and Guide Corp., the age of the former employees, and whether they are eligible for Medicare.

The notice includes a 45-day window to consider the agreement.

Guide stopped production at its Anderson plant in January, about six months earlier than planned in an unceremonial ending to what had once been one of the industry's key centers.

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