

More Thought Going Into Getting Most Out of Manure

For years, the farmer and his manure spreader have been the brunt of many a joke from non-farm people.

But manure is not a joke to farmers, nor to suburbanites who have moved in close to farms.

In fact, animal waste disposal is fast becoming the number one problem of farms and feedlots across the continent.

The increasing number of ag engineers, economists, soils men and crops men who have considered the problem in recent years agree it is becoming one of the most serious problems in agriculture.

These experts predict the problem of disposing of waste will become even more serious in the coming decade because of several recognizable trends. These include the increasing squeeze on farmers as suburbs expand into farmland and non-farm people seek a home by the road in the country.

Also adding to the problem is the increase in livestock numbers needed to feed a growing population, the increase in size of individual livestock and poultry operators, coupled with the trend toward confinement housing.

There is also a gradual decrease, in many areas, of easily available crop and pasture acreage where manure can be spread efficiently throughout the year, and increasing use of commercial fertilizers that can supply most of the major plant nutrients, which farmers once depended on manure to provide.

In short, there will be more waste produced as a result of increased livestock production and less land on which to dispose of it.

Editor's note: As fewer farmers are called on to produce more food and as urban residential areas sprawl into farmland areas, growing amounts of animal wastes accumulate and become a disposal problem.

As awareness of and concern about the environment grows, the issue of animal wastes can be expected to become more important.

Most agricultural authorities recognize animal wastes as important by-products of farming and as important assets of the farmer. The key issues for the farmer, as this article by the New Holland Division of Sperry Rand points out, are to find the best and most economical use of the wastes and to use the wastes in a manner that is inoffensive to neighbors and compatible with a clean environment.

Ag researchers across North America have been studying the problem and have come up with some interesting observations, if no clear cut solutions.

Odors and possible pollution problems from animal wastes have become so prevalent in some areas where farms, towns and suburbs intermingle, that teams of experts have joined forces to help farmers find a solution.

Near Plainfield, N. J., wastes from a huge 2,300-cow dairy operation, formerly dehydrated and sold as a garden soil conditioner, have triggered protests about odors from new home owners in the area. No less than 23 local, state, federal and private agencies are concentrating on the problem, with Rutgers University providing a research task force under the leadership of Agricultural Engineer Harry Besley.

In Canada, L. R. Weber and Tom Lane of the University of Guelph in Ontario have done some work in determining the acreage needed to handle manure from various farming operations.

In studying the manure output of various poultry, swine, dairy and cattle feeding installations, Lane and Weber have calculated maximum crop utilization of manure.

For instance, the pair found that for maximum crop utilization of the manure from a 100,000-capacity broiler operation during a 10-week period, 100 acres of corn land is needed for spreading. In further study the Canadians found similar acreage is needed for a 365-day operation of 10,000 layers, 1,000 hogs, 200 feeders or 100 dairy cattle.

A variety of other studies is under way how to best handle the growing mountain of animal waste from large centralized livestock operations.

Along with pits, lagoons, tanks and the like, the researchers are working on methods for composting the solids and injecting.

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