

Poultry manure requires proper care

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UNIVERSITY PARK — A farmer entered my office in May of 1981 after planting corn all day. He told a story about oats produced by poultry manure that happened 30 years ago.

Old, dry poultry litter and manure was taken out of a house where a breeder flock of chickens had been kept. The litter was spread on plowed ground thinly and evenly, then harrowed in and spring oats were planted. That fall 100 bushel of oats were harvested per acre which surprised everyone. This broke every record in the county.

Today we do not hear reports like this. Some say it is because fewer farmers grow oats today - farmers grow mostly corn. Maybe it is because farmers fear lodging of small grains where manure is used.

Poultry manure can reduce crop yields and even cause crop failure if the manure is not cared for properly or is applied too heavily. Here are a few factors to consider to keep fertilizer value high in poultry manure:

✓ Poultry manure should be dried inside the poultry house shortly after it is produced if it is to be stored inside the poultry house. If it is removed daily, it can be applied to fields fresh.

✓ Poultry should not be fed too much sodium or potassium since it is passed into manure and may take the form of a salt. Salt in soil is a problem for crops; it may be tested for in the routine soil test.

✓ Liquid or wet poultry manure that is more than 28 days old after it is produced but kept in a pit or storage area can be used as weed killer. Farmers report old wet or liquid manure depresses corn yields or kills weeds in soil when applied at a rate greater than 2 tons dry matter per acre. This is equivalent to 40 tons liquid manure per acre (10,000 gallons) or 10 tons per acre of manure at 80 percent moisture.

✓ Wet manure 6 months to one year old decreases slightly in volume but becomes more concentrated in gaseous ammonia, methane, hydrogen sulfide and some chemists feel that the presence of gaseous amines cause damage to crops or soils. Some other chemists feel the various forms of nitrogen may cause harm to plant growth.

✓ In summary, we must check manure for plant nutrient quality.

Nitrogen in fresh poultry manure is 70% in the form of urea and uric acid while 30% is protein nitrogen or organic nitrogen. Poultry manure should be equivalent to a 5-3-2 fertilizer on a dry weight basis when it is fresh and immediately incorporated into the soil.

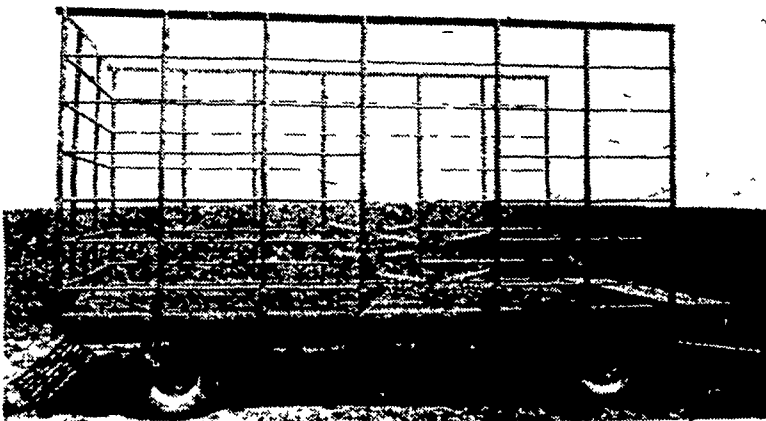
✓ Before you purchase a manure spreader always check it for the lowest application rate or lowest setting. At 55 percent moisture manure weighs about 55 pounds per bushel. Therefore, a spreader set at the lowest application rate, if it is applying 100

bushel to the acre, is applying 2.75 tons/acre which may be plenty for corn.

Fertilizer quality of poultry manure varies so it should be tested. Soil tests should be run every year prior to applying manure at a controlled level.

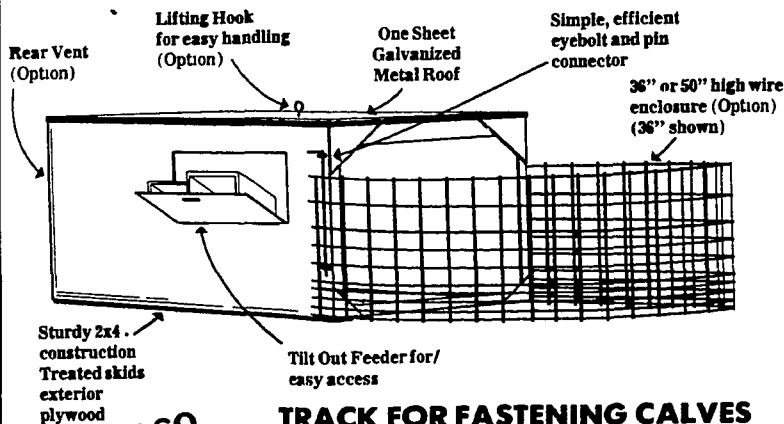
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For the Bomgardner brothers, Jay, Carl and Charles, hauling the manure from their 100 high producing dairy cows was a nightmare. At their Blue Mountain View Farm, Annville R3, these brothers tried many different manure handling systems before they found the Slurry-Brute manure pump from US Farm Systems of Pennsylvania.

"We tried a lot of different ways to get that stuff out of our 40x60 open pit," Jay Bomgardner said. "Different kinds of pumps and sucking spreaders. But nothing really worked. We would pump for hours trying to get the manure mixed up. But mostly after a day of pumping we would still just get out the water and leave the solids to build-up in the pit."

"Then we tried the Slurry-Brute and bought it on the spot. With the propeller and cutting knives to help the pumping action mix up the pit, we stirred up the manure in less than 2 hours. That's the same pit we couldn't get stirred up in 12 hours with other pumps. And the manure stayed in suspension even when we didn't get it all removed until several days later."

"And we filled the tanker with heavy manure in 3 minutes," Jay continued. "We really saved a lot of time and fuel with the Slurry-Brute. And as time and fuel become more expensive, having a pump that does the job will be worth more and more."

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