

Don't waste manure's nutrient potential

LEESPORT — "Are you wasting a valuable resource produced on your farm?" asks Mercedes Seman, soil conservationist for the Berks County Soil Conservation Service.

Livestock manure is a resource with excellent fertilizer properties, she points out. Both macronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium) and micronutrients (iron, boron, sulfur, etc.)

are found in animal manures, along with organic matter. This combination of nutrients and organic matter has high soil building properties as well as effective fertilizing qualities. Commercial fertilizers do not supply this combination of nutrients and organic matter in a single package.

The full nutrient value of manure is not immediately available to the

treated crop, but is slowly released as soil micro-organisms break down the nutrient compounds. Once a field undergoes a balance manure treatment program, a steady supply of available nutrients will be present for the growing crop. A balanced manure treatment program is not difficult to achieve and is a beneficial use of a valuable resource. Several methods are feasible.

"Of primary importance when devising a manure treatment program," states Seman "is to evenly distribute the manure over all fields on the farm." Due to inclement weather, equipment shortages, or time restrictions, fields close to the barn or more storage structure can receive a larger quantity of the manure supply.

Too much manure on a field over a period of time can lead to excessive nutrient levels in the soil. These levels are as damaging to crops as are deficiency levels of nutrients and are more difficult to remedy.

Having a storage structure for the manure aids in developing a balanced spreading system over all the fields. The manure can be unloaded and spread over all the fields in the spring for new and returning crops and in the fall for the following year's crops. This system avoids the field accessibility problems of the summer (maturing crops) and of the winter (inclement weather) which can lead to unequal field fertilization.

If a manure storage structure is not available, daily spreading of manure is an alternative management system. When using this system, vary the fields which receive manure application, she recommends.

"In good weather during the spring and fall take time to go to

the fields furthest from the barn. Then, as crops mature in the summer, making many fields inaccessible for the spreader, treat the early harvested fields. As winter sets in, the fields nearest the barn may be fertilized. In either spreading system, do not place manure on poorly drained areas, in flood prone areas, or within 100 feet of an open water source."

To gain the maximum benefit from the manure applications, Seman recommends that the surface applied manure be plowed under the same day it is spread.

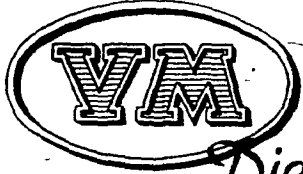
"Nitrogen (in the form of urea), an important nutrient in manure, easily returns to the atmosphere. If the manure is left on the field to dry and harden, approximately 20 percent of the N content is lost to the atmosphere."

A tank spreader, with chisel tines attached, will both spread and incorporate manure during the same trip over the field. Other spreaders require a second trip over the field for plow down.

"By realizing the fertilizer value and quality of livestock manures and by utilizing them in a balance fertilization program on your farm, fertilizer costs will be reduced and soil conditions will be improved," concludes Seman. "These beneficial results make manure a valuable on-farm resource, which should not be wasted."

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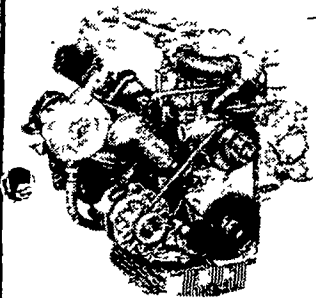
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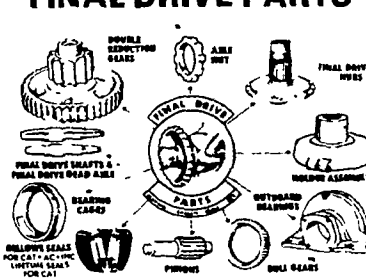
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