

Store poultry manure under plastic

NEWARK, Del. — Broiler producers can't always spread manure from their poultry houses as soon as it's removed, so it must be stored somewhere. But unless proper precautions are taken, stockpiling this manure can pose management and environmental problems, warns University of Delaware extension environmental quality specialist J. Ross Harris. The dilemma is easy to solve, though, with a few simple practices.

Two problems are involved in litter/manure storage. First, the material must be put where it's easily accessible to farm equipment. And it must be protected from rain or melting snow to prevent runoff into surface water or groundwater while preserving its fertilizer value for later crop use.

According to Harris, the best way to deal with both problems is to cover the manure with a large sheet of 6 mm black plastic, securing this along all four sides and over the top with some kind of anchor, such as old tires. The plastic will protect the environment from possible contamination, and at the same time maintain the manure's nutrient value at or near what it was at cleanout.

In demonstration projects Harris has conducted on poultry farms around the state over the past few years, and in research conducted by University of Delaware soil scientist Tom Sims with the aid of a DPI grant, this practice has proved very cost effective.

There's another advantage to storing broiler manure under plastic when it can't be spread immediately, the specialist says. By its very nature, this material is highly absorbant. It can easily hold almost twice its weight in water. This means that if stockpiled manure is exposed to rain, it can double in weight, thus leaving a grower with twice as much lifting to do when spreading time comes.

"You may carry 1,000 pounds of water to a field for every ton of manure in that uncovered pile," Harris says. "This means wasted time, plus added fuel costs and increased wear and tear on the spreader."

Cleanup is easier, too, when a covered pile has been stored. With uncovered sites, removing all the manure from the ground can be difficult and crops won't grow on the site for at least a year. But if a plastic tarp is used, planting can be done immediately, once the pile is gone. Covered manure is also

less likely to create odor problems in the neighborhood.

It will cost around \$80 for enough 6 mm black plastic to cover the manure and litter from a 20,000-bird broiler house, the specialist says. In Delaware that expense can be cost-shared through ASCS. What's more, in many cases the plastic will last more than one season.

"There are plenty of good reasons to cover broiler manure while it's being stored at times of the year when it can't be land-applied," Harris concludes. "This material is too valuable a nutrient source to misuse or waste. So the next time you have some to

stockpile, why not try this storage method?"

For other information on ways to make better use of poultry

manure, in Delaware contact county extension offices in Newark (451-2506), Dover (736-1448) or Georgetown (856-5250).

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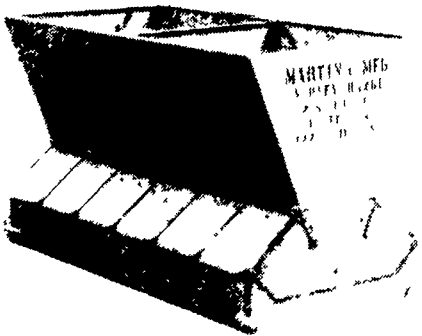
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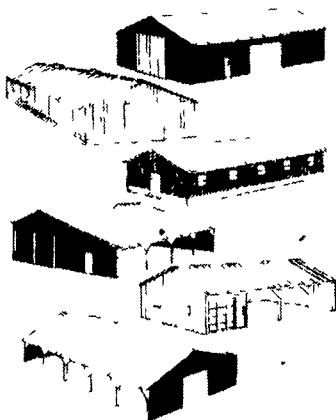
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