

# Harvey Wenger hopes to clean up manure's reputation

BY JACK HUBLEY

**NEW HOLLAND** — Most farmers are aware of the virtues of dried poultry waste as fertilizer and livestock feed. But few realize that some of the very first DPW produced in the United States was eaten by a Michigan State college professor.

The year was 1965 when Harvey Wenger, a former New Holland resident, first hit upon the idea of recycling poultry manure. Working for a local poultry equipment distributor, Wenger met a salesman who had just returned from Japan with a sample of dried poultry manure.

Wenger was so impressed with the product that he took it to Michigan State professor Dr. Howard Zindel for analysis. When he asked Zindel if he could identify the product, Zindel took a sample from the coffee can, then tasted it.

"I laughed and told him, 'you've just tasted dried chicken manure,'" recalls Wenger.

The intriguing thing about poultry, according to Wenger, is the way in which the birds process food. Poultry feed enters the bird at 16 or 17 percent protein and comes out at 20 percent 14 hours later. You feed three tons of feed and get one ton of dried product, says Wenger, noting that, unlike chemical fertilizers, DPW actually feeds the microscopic life in soil when used as fertilizer.

But soil flora aren't the only organisms that can take advantage of DPW's nutrients, says Penn State Extension poultry specialist Forest Muir. Because DPW is high in nitrogen it can be an important source of protein in livestock feed. Muir explains that organisms found in the rumen of

cattle have the ability to convert this nitrogen to protein.

Impressed with the potential of DPW as a fertilizer and feed, Wenger enlisted the aid of a Michigan-based furnace company in designing his first unit. At present, Wenger Dryers are being built by a local equipment manufacturer located in New Holland.

The hangup that a lot of people have is that they associate chicken manure with a rotten, stinking mess," says Wenger, pointing out that when dried right from the hen, DPW actually smells similar to feed.

Adapted for caged layers, the dryers are built to handle the output from a standard 50,000-bird house. An auger moves the manure automatically to the dryer where it piles up in a hopper and is fed into the dryer. Dried at 600 degrees F, and pulverized by a hammer mill, the manure emerges at 10 to 12-percent moisture.

The cost of drying a ton of manure runs about \$25 to \$30, or up to about \$40 for very wet manure.

What makes Wenger Meal<sup>™</sup> different from other dried manures? Wenger feels that his product is unique for a number of reasons. First, the product is dried fresh, within 48 hours of leaving the hen. It's also free of pesticide residues.

But what really sets his product apart, Wenger says, is its fine, granular texture. You can drain 30 tons out of a two-inch hole," says Wenger, noting that his DPW will also flow easily through a lawn spreader. Its texture makes the product adaptable for many uses, including spreading over vegetable crops, on hay crops

before successive cuttings or on pasture land while cattle are feeding.

One customer who is impressed with the performance of his Wenger Dryer is Bill Gerhart of Gilbertsville. Gerhart, who maintains 70 acres of cropland, uses some of the manure from his 46,000 layers in wet form, and dries about a ton of manure a day.

"You can use it in your corn planter box just like fertilizer," Gilbert says, noting that the product flows just like powder. We don't buy a pound of fertilizer here anymore."

Gerhart sells his surplus to local farmers and says he has no problem marketing his excess production. "These fellas swear by it," he says.

But despite the product's virtues, the market for DPW has increased little in the past decade, says John Noll, vice president of A.H. Hoffman, Inc., Landisville. Hoffman buys the dried product and mixes it with turkey manure to produce a product the company calls Hoffman's Super Manure. The manure is then retailed as fertilizer in packages ranging from five to 40 pounds.

Noll points out that cow manure will outsell poultry manure any day of the week, because of its rich, dark color. From an analysis standpoint, though, the firm's Super Manure is far superior to cow manure, says Noll. One other advantage of the dried poultry manure is that the drying process kills weed seeds, says Noll.

But the main reason for DPW's slow acceptance has been the cost of fueling the dryers, says Forest Muir. One source of fuel that needs to be explored is broiler manure,

he says. With its high wood shavings content, incinerated broiler waste could prove to be a low-cost alternative to fossil fuels.

Wenger himself remains a staunch proponent of DPW as both

fertilizer and feed. And though he is not optimistic about increasing consumption among college professors, he is confident that more markets for his Wenger Meal lie just around the corner.



Harvey Wenger demonstrates the fine texture of his Wenger Meal. The finely ground dried poultry manure is produced in dryers like the one in the background.

## PROGRAM

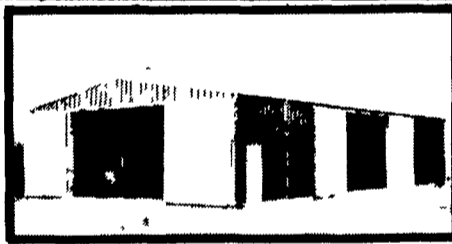


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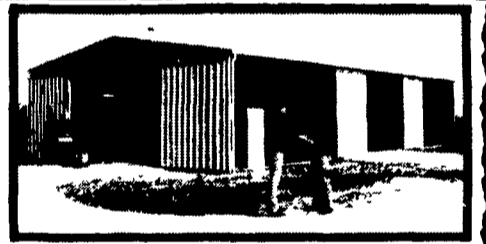
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