

# Adams County Composting Program Under Review

**JINNY WILT**

**Adams County Correspondent**  
ADAMS COUNTY — Mother Nature's been doing it for years — and so have farmers and gardeners.

Now comes a way to speed up

this natural process that could possibly make manure and other vegetable matter a money producer for farmers.

The process is composting, a popular method of turning manure and vegetable waste

into a beneficial product.

Recently David D. Koun Jr., Adams County Chesapeake Bay Program nutrient management specialist along with John Caffrey, a New Jersey businessman, brought a portable labora-

tory model of a mechanical composter to Adams County. In a joint effort with the local Conservation district they placed the composter — or digester as some call it — on several farms for a few days so that farmers could see it in a field operation. While this model was not automated, most would be, Caffrey said.

Caffrey's company worked with Texas A&M to develop the digester which can go from site to site—to farms, food processors and sewage plants and potentially lower disposal costs.

After its stay in Adams County, the composter was going to Penn State where it was to be used experimentally in the disposal of sewage and farm waste, and possibly vegetative waste from the cafeteria.

He noted proposed changes to composting regulations make the digester a valuable tool for

the farmer. "In the past you used to be able to take your manure or whatever you had and dump it out there but with the changes that are coming farmers will no longer, in some cases, be able to do that. So we're offering what we believe is the cheapest solution to a lot of their problems. Since an \$18,000 unit will take care of the waste of up to 50 dairy cattle per day."

And, some compost can be used as a feed supplement, he said.

Kann added that in particular turkey farmers might find the digester a valuable tool for composting manure since many of them have "small properties" and are trucking their waste long distances.

He uses Maryland as an example where the land is already high in phosphorus and so is turkey manure. "One option would be turning it into compost," Kann said.

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Kann added that he officially responded to the Animal Feeding Operations Strategy (AFO), a joint proposal of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to follow a strategy to use interpretations of existing authorities and programs to get all livestock farmers to adopt comprehensive nutrient management plans.

In his response to AFO he expressed concern "That we're getting into an area that is dangerous and costly to the farmer who does not have the option to pass the buck."

But, Kann adds, with an onsite composter, the farmer could have another product to sell.

The act of composting is "Using nature's micro-organisms to reduce an organic material to its basic mineral forms. So if composting is ultimately completed down to its final reduction you would get calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and whatever else was in the basic material.

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