

Aeration Key

(Continued from Page 6)

trucked to finishing farms where they reach a weight of 240-250 pounds. The Pine Hill Facility has been in operation since 1996.

Some of the manure generated by the farrowing facility is spread on the farm's 130 tillable acres.

"When we really notice (the difference in the odor) is on application of the manure when we spread. My subjective feeling is that we have a 50 percent reduction. We had a third party come in from the Midwest and evaluate when we were doing it and I think it's fair to say with their analysis that we were indeed reducing the odor," said Frame.

To comply with nutrient management regulations, the remainder of the manure is given to 20 area farmers free of charge, under agreements that require certain application rates and usage. Some of these farmers noticed the changes in the amount of odor immediately.

"We had one guy who takes manure from the lagoon ask, 'if it doesn't stink, is it any good?' He was concerned that it wasn't doing what it was supposed to do. Another farmer asked what we were doing differently," said Frame.

Another local farmer, who has been getting manure from the sow farm since it was built, noticed the difference immediately. He claims that the manure doesn't have the odor that it once had and that the odor doesn't linger in the air nearly as long.

Jennifer Reed notes that there is a tremendous demand for the manure from the pits.

"Farmers want this manure. They've seen what it can do for their crops and there's actually a waiting list," Reed said.

An added benefit of aerating the manure is that you have a more consistent product to spread on the fields.

"We have a running average of samples of the manure that is taken out of the pit," said Frame. "It we were to take 10 samples after the first 5 loads and 10 samples after 10 loads and after 15, I think we'd have more consistency in the sample results, whereas before, if you did that same pattern, we'd probably have less consistency in the analysis. In terms of change in the nutrient content, I don't think we're doing that and that's not our intent," said Frame.

Current nutrient management plans are based on nitrogen, however phosphorus has been gaining more attention in the past several years.

Yet another strategy Country View Family Farms implements through the feed company is the addition of phytase, a natural enzyme, into the sow's feed. This enzyme increases phosphorus use

by the animal, reducing the mineral in the manure by 50 percent over the last five years.

"Penn State has typical averages for the state of what your manure analysis should be for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, and what we've seen in our manure results is that in our manure samples, our phosphorus is a lot lower than the state average," said Reed.

"We're going to be involved with a phosphorous study with Penn State this spring," said Frame.

Reed added that Country View Family Farms works with many different groups on several projects aimed at farming more efficiently and improving public perception.

"One project that we're working with most hand in hand is that Pennsylvania has a nutrient management plan based on nitrogen and they're coming out with phosphorous indexing.

"Chris and I knew that our phosphorous levels were a lot less than the state average, so we kind of got some conversations started and they're going to come up and do some sampling of manure, they're going to look at soils and at phosphorus run-off and other things that tie in with the phosphorous indexing with the state, to get some really solid data.

"They're going to use several of our sow, nursery and finishing farms to do that research," said Reed.

Another project that will be conducted with Penn State is the use of a methane digester.

"My opinion is that with any industry, you talk to other people who are in the industry all throughout," said Reed.

"We're watching what they had to do in North Carolina, we're working with people out in Iowa and Kansas and watching what's going on out there, from feed to aeration to cover to separators and trying to soak it all in and come up with the best things to use.

"We're basically going anyplace that someone is using the technology that might work for us."

They also constantly get calls from representatives who want them to try new products. They must weed through all the options to find the products that really work.

Country View Family Farms oversees 26 sow farms varying in size from 400 to more than 4,000. Pleasant Valley Foods owns the pigs, Country View Family Farms represents the interests of the pig owners, and Hostetter Management Company has been contracted by Country View Family Farms to manage all their swine farms.

"There are a lot of contract finishers throughout the state and nearly all of them are family farms," said Frame. "Even some of our sow farms are owned by individuals and we contract them."

(Turn to Page 9)