Winter Manure Spreading – *Doing it the Right to Farm Way*

Many dairy producers in Michigan mistakenly assume that manure cannot be applied to fields in the winter. That may be the case in other states, but in Michigan it is legal to apply manure on frozen and snow covered fields as long as the Right to Farm Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPs) for manure utilization are being followed.

Some of the confusion may stem from a section in the Right to Farm guidelines that advises farmers to avoid applying manure to frozen or snow covered ground. Because it is not always possible for every farm to do so, the guidelines also give specific instructions on how to apply manure to frozen or snow covered ground in order to greatly reduce the risk of runoff.

Know Your Slope

Manure applied in the winter should stay where it is spread even when the snow melts. To ensure this, the Right to Farm guidelines recommend applying solid manures only where slopes are six percent or less and applying liquid manures where slopes are three percent or less. Runoff and erosion must be controlled through vegetative buffer strips and water conservation practices wherever manure is applied.

"The number one criteria for assessing a field's risk for runoff during the winter is the producer's past knowledge of each field," says Natalie Rector, Michigan State University Extension Nutrient Management Educator. "If a field has a history of rain and snow running off, especially if erosion is common, then it is not a candidate for surface applications of manure."

Avoid the Water

Fields that slope toward surface water should be avoided whenever possible, as the risk of applied manure reaching the water increases dramatically. When possible, alternate fields should be selected. If you must spread on a field that slopes toward water, Natalie advises using extreme caution to decrease the runoff risk.

According to the Right to Farm Guidelines, manure should not be applied within 150 feet of surface waters or to areas subject to flooding unless the manure is injected or immediately incorporated (generally within 48 hours). Conservation practices must be used to protect against runoff and erosion losses to surface waters.

Plan Ahead

It may be too late to totally plan ahead this year, but next year, Natalie suggests planting cover crops or a permanent vegetative buffer. If you haven't already worked up the fields this year, you should leave the fields rough tilled and may still be able to run over unfrozen fields with an aeration tillage tool to increase absorption and decrease runoff.

Use the tools you already have to determine the best fields for winter spreading. Gather soil surveys, aerial maps and know where surface waters are located in each field you plan to spread on. Natalie advises taking a drive around the perimeter of each field to determine problems that could arise.

"As they drive each field, producers should ask themselves, what would happen if manure were applied to this field and there was a rapid spring snow melt?" Natalie says. "They should then determine what could be done ahead of time to prevent or minimize risk in that situation. Prioritizing fields based on the level of risk associated with runoff from frozen and snow covered soil can help producers direct winter spreading to fields that carry the least risk for runoff."

Farms with a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) likely addressed the winter spreading issue when creating their plan and should follow their CNMP when it is necessary to spread manure in the winter.

Help is Available

Planning assistance is available to producers who want to reduce their risk of runoff when applying manure in the winter. A computer spreadsheet is available through the www.maeap.org Web site called the Manure Application Risk Index (MARI). This tool helps producers evaluate fields, assess risks, and determine a relative risk ranking for all fields. You can get help analyzing and inputting information into MARI by contacting your local NRCS and conservation district office or finding a private consultant. Additional information is available at www.rootzone.msu.edu.

Seek Alternatives to Spreading on Frozen Ground

Winters in Michigan can be cold and hard, but farms in the Lower Peninsula do generally experience a few days of warmer weather. According to Natalie, this is an ideal time to inject manure or incorporate it into the soil after

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Welcome New MMPA Members

The MMPA Board of Directors recently accepted the following new members:

Clare Local
Double H Dairy
Tony Hipkins, Connie Hipkins, Farwell, MI

Constantine Local
David F. Blough, Goshen, IN
Daniel A. Bontrager, Topeka, IN
Andrew W. Ramer, New Paris, IN
Enus H. Yoder, Millersburg, IN

Dairyland Local
Ephraim Martin, Ester Martin, Sheridan, MI

Deford/Clifford-Mayville Local
Hunter Dairy Farms, Ginger L. Hunter, Kingston, MI
Donald R. Wilson, Clifford, MI

Evart Local
Marda Jehnsen, Rodney, MI

Grand Rapids Local
Brad R. Herzog, Allendale, MI

Hillman Local
Godfrey Farms Inc., John Godfrey, Angela Godfrey, Hillman, MI

Hillsdale-Litchfield Local
H & S Dairy, Charles B. Spencer, Marc Hartzler, Harold T. Spencer, Charles E. Spencer, Jonesville, MI
Ron Rayba, Hudson, MI
Jeff Rehklau, Waldron, MI

Kalamazoo Local
K & W Dairy, Wesley Visser, Karen Visser, Plainwell, MI

Muskegon Local
Allen Slater, Aaron Slater, Holton, MI

Sandusky Local
Sheldon D. Zimmerman, Janita Zimmerman, Snover, MI

Sunrise Local
Jack L. Mrozinski, Alger, MI

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spreading. With a manure storage area that holds a month or two of waste, producers could feasibly inject or incorporate manure on warm winter days, which greatly reduces the risk of runoff.

The key to winter spreading for any size farm is to follow the Right to Farm guidelines for manure management. Doing so helps producers greatly reduce the risk of runoff and helps to ensure the viability of the practice in the future.

"Producers actions make a large impact on the future of this practice," explains Natalie. "Many producers apply manure appropriately to frozen and snow covered fields without repercussions, but when one producer applies onto a hilly field that melts and drains to the road ditch, everyone hears about it."

2007 District Meeting Schedule

District	Date	Time	Place
1	Wed., Feb. 21	11:00 a.m.	Gene Davis Banquet Center, Jackson
2	Mon., Feb. 19	11:00 a.m.	Constantine Village Hall, Constantine, MI
4	Tues., Feb. 27	11:00 a.m.	Coyote Creek Grille, Dimondale
5	Tues., Feb. 20	11:00 a.m.	New Hope United Methodist Church, Remus
6	Mon., Feb. 19	11:00 a.m.	Main Street Cafe, St. Johns
7	Wed., Feb. 28	11:00 a.m.	Walli's - East, Flint
8	Tues., Feb. 27	11:00 a.m.	Ubly Heights Golf Course, Ubly
10	Tues., Feb. 22	10:15 a.m.	Valley Plaza Conference Center, Midland
11	Wed., Feb. 14	11:00 a.m.	Swan Inn, Comstock Park
12	Fri., Feb. 23	11:00 a.m.	United Methodist Church, Engadine