

How it's working for One Iowa Pork Producer

When Gary Ledger bought the old farm on the highway two miles outside Williamsburg about 10 years ago, he knew he would need to make improvements in both the condition of the buildings and the relationship with his new neighbors.

"This had been a beef lot and the owner had agreements with local crop growers to use the manure," says Ledger, a farrow-to-finish hog producer with 400 sows and a thriving swine genetics company. "But things hadn't worked out well with some of the growers, so I knew I had some rebuilding to do.

"When we purchased the operation, it only had about three to four months worth of manure storage. We're in an area where there's a lot of rolling hills and CRP acres, so it required us to make a lot of 'top of the ground' applications several times a year," he says. "That wasn't terribly appealing. I have 40 residences within two miles of my operation. We live on a highway, so we're very noticeable. We were really conscious of not only the environmental concerns, with runoff and so on, but also of our neighbors - making sure we had a good image in the community."

Securing funding through the cost-sharing program, EQIP, Ledger put in additional storage and now has room for up to 16 months of production. Ledger was able to use engineers and technical services staff from the Soil Conservation Service in the planning of his new site and expansion of his manure storage capabilities.

Making the deals

Four years ago, Ledger negotiated a deal with three area crop growers to share the cost of custom application using a state-of-the-art umbilical system that employs a drag hose and injection bar to shoot the manure directly into the soil.

"At first, the farmers were concerned about compaction and whether they would get the amount of nutrient they needed," he says. "But with this system, there's very little compaction and since we do nutrient analysis of the manure, I can sit down with them and tell them pretty much everything that's going into the soil. It's not cheap, but it's a good investment.

"We're producing just about a million gallons a year now, so we're able to cover about 160 acres each fall. We're on a three-year rotation, so each farmer uses the manure one year, then plants corn on the ground in the spring so they can make the best use of the nitrogen. The following year, they'll plant soybeans, following with corn again.

"We're on some pretty poor soil down here, lots of hills that let nutrients wash away if there isn't enough organic material, so the manure really helps improve the soil," Ledger says. "The farmers have told me that they've seen improved yields with the manure, so they're pretty happy.

"We don't charge anything for the manure right now but, at some point, I'd like to get enough monetary value from it to pay my half of the application fee. But for right now, it's worth it to be able to use the manure in a way that improves the soil and benefits both me and my neighbors."

Communication is key

When developing a relationship between crop growers and hog farmers regarding the use of manure as a crop fertilizer, Ledger advises hog producers to be sure to outline the benefits of the manure in terms the crop growers can appreciate. "Approach it in the manner that is most beneficial to them. Know your nutrient content and have options for application that address the compaction issues.

"It's important to be open with your neighbors and work out problems before they get big. We had an issue with one of the growers where we didn't get enough manure applied to his field," Ledger admits. "I talked with him and could see that we didn't give him what he expected, so I agreed to pay his half of the application for that year. It was worth keeping the relationship and it will help us be more careful with the next application."

KEY POINTS

- » **Key Point Number 1**
The process is working successfully across Iowa
- » **Key Point Number 2**
Communication with crop growers and neighbors is key
- » **Key Point Number 3**
Speak in the crop growers' terms about the benefits they can receive
- » **Key Point Number 4**
Hog manure is good for Iowa's soil

"Approach it in the manner that is most beneficial to the crop grower."

- Gary Ledger,
Williamsburg

Too Much Information?

One thing's for certain. There's no drought when it comes to information about manure management and agronomic inputs. But that might be part of the problem.

Do an internet search and you'll find hundreds of research papers, technical reports and opinions about how hog producers should use their manure production.

To help out, we've compiled a list of online and traditional resources you can rely upon if you want to learn more about communicating the value of hog manure as an agronomic input.

- » Iowa Pork Producers Association 1636 114th St. NW, Clive, IA 50325, Phone 1-800-372-7675, www.iowapork.org
- » The Iowa Manure Management Action Group (IMMAG), Angela Rieck-Hinz, ISU Extension Program Specialist, Iowa State University, 2104 Agronomy, Ames, Iowa 50011-1010, Phone (515) 294-9590. Duane Miller, Manure Management Specialist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Federal Building, 210 Walnut Street, Suite 693, Des Moines, IA 50309-2180, Phone (515) 284-4370, www.extension.agron.iastate.edu/immag/
- » Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), 210 Walnut Street, 693 Federal Building, Des Moines, IA 50309, Phone (515) 284-4260, www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/
- » Iowa Independent Crop Consultants Association (IICCA), 4536 114th Street, Urbandale, Iowa 50322, 515/727-0648 or 515/251-8657, www.iowacropconsultants.com/
- » National Pork Board, 1776 N.W. 114th Street, Clive, IA, 50325 515-223-2600, <http://www.porkenvironment.org/Home/Manure/Manure.asp>
- » Iowa State University Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering, 100 Davidson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-3080, 515 294-1434, <http://www.ae.iastate.edu/waste.htm>

Please keep in mind:

Manure management plans are required for confinement operations. Current plans are based on nitrogen uptake by crops. Iowa law requires livestock farmers to document the availability of land for manure application with written agreements unless the land is owned or rented by the livestock farmer. Many landowners welcome the use of manure as a commercial fertilizer replacement due to the benefits of organic nutrients and organic matter in the manure, which enhances crop production. The agreements should include the number of acres available and the length of the agreement.

Manure management plan forms are available online at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Web site: www.state.ia.us/epd/wastewtr/feedlot/manure.htm.

Typically, manure agreements include names of parties in the agreement; location of animal feeding operation; location of land where manure is to be applied, terms and termination of the agreement; time of application; method and responsibility for application; liability for regulations and permits; level of soil nutrients; payments for manure and/or application; and warranties or disclaimers regarding quality and quantity of manure. Other agreements conditions may include binding effect; assignment; limitation of liability and indemnification; entire agreement; amendments; severability' and any other provisions and comments regarding the agreement between the parties involved.

Issues for a landowner to consider:

- » Soil nutrient levels
- » Nutrient requirements of crops
- » Nutrient content of the manure to be applied
- » Cost of organic nutrients compared to nutrients from commercial fertilizer
- » Potential soil compaction caused by application equipment

Issues for a hog producer to consider:

- » Removal and application of manure from the facility in compliance with regulations.
- » Cost of removal and application of manure
- » Sale value of manure