

Highlights from the Survey of Manure Management Practices in North Dakota

S. Birchall

A phone survey of 354 North Dakota livestock producers (beef, dairy, and swine) was completed during February 1999. The objectives of the survey were to assess the level of adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs) relating to manure management and to identify issues that future extension efforts need to address. The questions were grouped into the following categories: classifying the operation; collection, storage and handling practices; nutrient budgeting; carcass disposal; and assistance needs. Results were grouped according to species, as well as whether the operation had an "approval to operate" from the Department of Health.

The survey highlighted producers' management strengths as well as areas where improvement is needed. In the following areas, producers deserve commendation:

- The high participation rate in soil testing manure application areas.
- The focus on spreading manure outside of winter months.

The following points are areas in which producers should be considering changes:

- Constructing new or enlarging existing manure storage facilities (particularly producers without an "approval to operate").
- Having manure analyzed for nutrient content.
- Keeping records of manure spreading operations.

While it is most important for producers to adopt practices that minimize the risk of pollution, a significant number of medium-sized producers (200 to 1,000 Animal Units) also need to make efforts to secure an "approval to operate." Community concerns will only be alleviated by producers showing that their industry is complying with the state's regulations.

The survey results indicate some critical information needs that must be met by people providing information and assistance to North Dakota's livestock producers. Agencies must work to raise the level of awareness regarding environmental regulations to ensure that producers are able to assess their compliance and, if they need to make changes, whether they can get technical or cost share assistance.