

Is Manure a Waste Problem or a Resource?

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Change really is a function of the mind. Our mind-set determines to what extent we are open to change and if the possibility really exists. For all practical purposes, how we look at a problem will determine if we are willing to change.

The challenge that most beef producers are trying to decipher comes in the form of a question. Is the operation that I manage an animal feeding operation? Really, whether the answer is a yes or no, the question opens the door to a change. This change has significant impacts and ramifications. Ultimately, the objective is to channel those impacts toward a positive outcome for the operation.

Several opportunities have been available for beef producers to get acquainted with upcoming animal waste regulations. Did I say waste? Actually I did, but one needs to think through what one actually is trying to say.

Lately, as I listened to Ron Wiederholt, North Dakota State University Extension nutrient management specialist at the NDSU Carrington Research Extension Center, he stated that “we really have to move away from the word waste. What is wrong with the word manure? Better yet, why don’t we call manure a resource? I work with manure and nutrient resources. If manure was a waste, then we would have no justification to spend the amount of time and money we do trying to utilize it properly.”

Not only is manure the best natural plant nutrient source we have, but it also is unequalled as a soil amendment for improving soil quality and health. The point again is, how do we look at a problem and is a problem really a problem or an opportunity?

As livestock producers, Ron was noting that we need to muster our abilities to put a different spin on the waste management issue. Producers need to focus on the positive outcomes that the livestock operation has in generating nutrients. These nutrients are a benefit to everyone.

Looking back in time, the subject of manure handling is not new. Anyone who has been involved with livestock also has been involved with manure management at some point. The concept of spreading manure that accumulated while cattle or other livestock were confined became very apparent as people started utilizing hip-roof barns and tie stalls or stanchions to restrain cattle.

The concept of a gutter evolved quickly. Information about the handling of larger-sized cattle herds has been emerging for some time. As Ron notes, “just the other day I was going through some of my files and found an article by S.L. Boyles, NDSU Extension Service. Boyles was outlining all the reasons why beef producers have to be concerned with facility location and proper manure application to protect water and other natural resources. The paper is not dated, but all of the references are from 1986 and previous years.”

Steve Boyles was an Extension livestock specialist in the mid ‘80s for NDSU. Ron is correct when the notation is made that there is little reason today to be surprised by demands on manure accountability and the appropriate utilization of manure as a resource involving land management.

Yes, we have a manure issue, but, as an industry, the opportunity needs to be cultivated to more effectively utilize the resources at hand. The issue at this point needs to be kept front and center and each operation eventually will have to muster the wherewithal to ask the question. Am I an animal feeding operation and how do I interact with the future so that the environmental impact of my livestock operation is positive and the nutrients I have to offer have value?

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDB-CIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.



WASTE

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Ron Wiederholt
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