

Spring Manure Issue for Dairies

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Spring is often a sloppy, wet, muddy scene on an Iowa dairy farm. While pastures may be greening up with the sun and moisture, snowmelt and rain runoff from cow yards and farmsteads can cause some challenges for manure management. This is the time of year you should consider spending some time doing a self assessment of your cow yards, manure storage structures, stockpiles, manure loading areas and feed storage areas to make sure that manure nutrients and effluent from feedstuffs is not reaching a water of the state.

There are several resources available to help with a self- assessment, but often just walking below cow yards, manure stockpiles and feed storage areas can help you determine if you have a potential problem that could lead to a water quality violation.

The following publications are part of the Farm*A*Syst series developed by the Iowa Farm Bureau and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Links to the on-line version of these publications are provided for you use. If you don't have access to the Web, please contact me or your local ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team member and we will mail you a copy of the requested material.

Assessing Your Open Feedlot Manure Management

<http://www.iowafarmbureau.com/files/pages/194/EDC267.pdf>

Assessing Your Milking Center Wastewater Management

<http://www.iowafarmbureau.com/files/pages/194/EDC269.pdf>

Another tool is the Feedlot EMS worksheet, created by the Iowa Beef Center at Iowa State. Although this was written for beef production, the worksheet is very applicable to dairy farms where cows are housed outdoors. It can be accessed at:

http://www.iowabeefcenter.org/Docs_environment/Feedlot_Assessment_Worksheet.pdf

These tools allow producers to evaluate their own situation, under a variety of climatic conditions and provide the opportunity to make improvements to protect water quality in a confidential manner. The tools can also be used by a third-party to assist producers in identifying areas of concern.

Best Management Practices

Dairy producers should employ all best management practices to reduce off-site movement of nutrients from cow yards, manure stockpiles and feed storage areas.

Divert clean water from entering the cow yard or open lot with use of gutters for roofs, or terraces or clean water diversions for surface water.

Scrape lots frequently to avoid a build-up of manure solids

Carefully locate stockpiles and mortality compost piles to prevent runoff. (Know the stockpiling regulations- see below).

Keep feedstuffs dry. Prevent runoff of silage effluent

Clean-up spilled manure, feed, silage and bedding.

Additional Resources

There are many good resources available on manure management for dairy producers. Here are some resources for Iowa dairy producers.

Open Feedlot Manure Stockpiling Regulations

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Portals/idnr/uploads/afo/files/Open%20Feedlot%20Stockpiling%20FS%20Final.pdf>

Small Open Lot Dairies in Iowa- a producer guide

<http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/pubs/PM3019openlotdairies.pdf>

Testing the Waters: A beef and dairy producers' guide to water quality below open lots

<http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/info/testingthewaters.pdf>