

## **The Problem with Poultry Manure**

Poultry manure is pouring into rural southwest Missouri counties from concentrated poultry operations in northwest Arkansas. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources does not know how much is coming in or where it is going. It arrives in 25 ton trucks, and is piled two stories high before it finally gets spread around on fields.

Because of excessive pollution in their lakes and streams, nearby states have tightened their laws about how much manure can be applied, when, and where. As our neighbors tighten their rules, Missouri's lack of regulation makes us the easier place to dump.

Of course animal manure can be good for plants. As with everything in nature, it is a question of balance. Factory farms or CAFOS (concentrated animal feeding operations) generate a lot of manure in one place. If all that manure is applied in that one place, nitrogen and phosphorus, the plant nutrients in manure, can become serious pollutants and threaten water quality.

Missouri and most states have some guidelines, called "best management practices" that suggest that manure should not be applied too close to waterways or springs, on saturated or frozen ground, or too close to residences, for example. In some states these are mandatory, such as Iowa's recent prohibition of application on frozen ground (when there would be no plant uptake). None of these, in Missouri, are mandatory. When they do apply, they are related to the permitted entity – the CAFO. They do not apply to smaller unregulated CAFOs.

But the real problem is that once the poultry manure is sold or given away nobody knows where it goes (pig waste is stored as a liquid and applied via spraying or pipes so it is not as easily sold or transported). Iowa, Oklahoma, and Arkansas have rules now that require reporting and licensing of commercial manure haulers. Some even require soil tests of every field where the manure will be applied to avoid over application. Over applying manure will cause water pollution problems because plants can only take up so much. When more is applied than can be used, the balance of nature is upset, and the remainder will runoff with the rains and pollute our rivers and lakes.

Too much nitrogen and phosphorus in streams and lakes can cause a "Dead Zone" that will make the waters uninhabitable for aquatic life. Additionally, of growing concern, nutrient pollution can enable toxic algae to flourish, which can cause illness and death in people or animals that ingest it and can also significantly increase the cost of water treatment.

## **Tracking the Manure**

MDNR cannot effectively do its job protecting the waters of the state unless they know what is causing the problems. Tracking where animal manure goes once it leaves a factory farm is critical. Setting standards to prevent over application will help keep our waters clean. Missouri needs laws that:

- License manure haulers.
- Require documentation of where the manure comes from and where it goes, when, and how much.
- Require documentation that the fields that get the manure will use the manure.

These laws are essential to cleaning up our polluted waters.