

Where Does Pig Manure Go?

Environmental stewardship is probably not the word that comes to mind when you think about pig farming. And especially when I talk about pig manure. I mean, let's face it, poop has the ultimate "yuck" factor. Can pig farmers turn "yuck" into something good for the environment? Let's take a look to see where pig manure goes.



Pigs on Slats

Where does all the manure go?

Modern pig barns allow pigs to stand on cement slats. Slats are made of cement and have elongated, slotted holes where the pigs' manure falls through into cement pits. In the upper midwest, this is the most common way to store pig manure.

Are pits safe?

When barns are constructed properly, pits in barns are very safe. Cement pits prevent manure from leaking into surrounding soils.

What about the smell?

Yes, manure does have an odor. Barns use ventilation fans which allow pigs to have clean air on a continual basis. Our pig barns are located on the same place as my home. The location of the barns and wind direction determine the odor level. My house windows are open every chance I get during our warm months. I find I shut my house windows only a few days a year because of odor.

How is the manure removed from the pits?

Removing manure from pits is accomplished by using a manure pump. Before it's pumped, an agitator (stirs manure) is used to help put the manure in a more consistent state (mixes solids with liquids). Agitation helps make the application more precise when applied to the soils. The pump places the manure into a manure spreader, which is then pulled behind a tractor and applied to soils. This normally occurs once a year after harvest season.

Are there any dangers in removing manure from the pits?

Yes, farmers need to be very careful and vigilant when removing manure from the pits because of possible precarious pit gasses. These gasses can be lethal to both pigs and humans if not done properly. To prevent problems, farmers ventilate their barns well when removing the manure from pits. Online resources are available to farmers and can be used as reminders during the manure spreading season.

How often is it removed?

Most farms have enough storage for a year. Sometimes, farmers will plant a shorter growing season crop so they can apply manure to those acres if they don't have enough pit capacity for a year.



Manure Spreader

How is the manure applied to soils?

Once manure is pumped into the manure spreader the tractor and manure spreader (which is pulled behind the tractor) drives through and applies the manure to the field. Manure is pumped through tubes on the back of the manure spreader and is applied directly to the soils. At the same time, there are two discs for each tube that immediately cover and incorporates the manure into the soil. Covering manure results in reduced odor and conservation of nutrients. As a farmer, we love applying pig manure to our crop lands. It provides great nutrients for next year's crops. In fact, [pig manure is on my balance sheet](#). Check out the video.

Isn't there just too much manure for the amount of land available?

It's a requirement that farmers have a [Manure Management Plan in Minnesota](#), which is overseen

by the MPCA (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency). Farmers are required to have enough acres of land available to spread manure for a number of gallons their farm(s) create. If they personally do not have enough farmland, farmers usually work with a neighboring farmer and their land.

How do farmers prevent applying too much manure to their fields?

Regularly, farmers take soil tests and manure tests. Between the two tests, a determination is made on the amount of manure needed to replace soil nutrients. Farmers use consultants to assist them in understanding the proper amounts of applied manure. Once a rate is determined, a flow meter (on the manure spreader) accurately places the correct amount of manure in the soils. Another fact: Manure is so valuable that I put it on my balance sheet!

Is manure leaking into our streams and rivers?

Farmers are very careful when spreading manure. There are buffer strips between fields and rivers and streams. There is no incentive to waste valuable nutrients by having it leak into rivers and streams.

What if there is an accidental manure spill?

Pig farmers have an emergency action plan, which includes steps to take if there is an accidental manure spill.

There is real value in pig manure. In fact, in our opinion, pig manure is superior to commercial fertilizers. And it's natural. When you think about it, using a hog's waste to replace soil nutrients is the ultimate recycling program.

As you can see, there is quite a process to handling a pig's manure. And as stated above, manure is a valuable asset and we treat it as such.



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