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Farmers urged to take steps now to empty manure storage structures, weather permitting
MADISON – Wisconsin agriculture and natural resource officials are urging livestock producers to take steps now to properly manage manure in coming months and to avoid taking short cuts.

Reports that financially-stressed farmers may be delaying emptying their storage structures as a cost-saving measure are stirring concerns of an increased risk later of manure spills and other problems.

“Producers are struggling as it is – they don’t need the additional stress, cost and labor that can come from having a manure spill, an overtopped storage structure or runoff into lakes and streams,” says Rod Nilsestuen, who leads the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

“We urge all producers to make sure they are taking the steps now and before winter to properly manage manure and avoid problems later.”

The state agriculture department is joining with the Department of Natural Resources, the University of Wisconsin-Extension, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin (PNAAW) to reach producers with an important reminder of the necessary steps and information about available help to manage manure. The partners are using radio advertisements, press releases and other outreach activities. More information about the effort and the steps to take can be found online at <http://dnr.wi.gov/runoff/ag/manure.html>.

Almost half of Wisconsin’s dairy producers use storage and liquid manure spreading systems to efficiently handle and manage manure. The cost of agitating, hauling, and incorporating manure into farm fields runs from \$100 to \$250 per cow per year; with Wisconsin farms averaging 87 cows, the total could run \$8,700 to more than \$21,000 a year, according to Kevin Erb, UW-Extension’s advisor to the applicators association.

Reports from manure haulers, producers themselves, and county agriculture agents suggest that producers, stressed by low prices, tightened credit, and fluctuating feed, fertilizer and other costs, may not be asking their bankers for money to cover the costs of properly handling and spreading the manure produced on their farm, he says.

“We’ve heard that some farmers may be delaying manure applications that would normally be going out in early fall on wheat and silage fields,” Erb says. Delaying manure applications now will increase the likelihood of overflowing manure storage that will trigger a lot of extra work and cost for them, he says.

Agriculture generates \$59 billion for Wisconsin

“We have only a limited amount of time when we can safely apply manure – and we can’t control the weather to extend the window,” Erb says. “If the manure storage is not completely emptied in the fall, farmers may face the difficult choice of letting it overflow in spring or spreading on fields at one of the highest risk times of the year.” Both options could result in fish kills, contaminated drinking wells, fines and upset neighbors.

“Properly managing manure is a critical part of a well-run farm,” says DNR Secretary Matt Frank. “And farmers play a critical part in helping Wisconsin protect public health and our waters.”

Pat Leavenworth, NRCS State Conservationist for Wisconsin, says that farmers should take four key steps in coming weeks and months, and can tap into state and federal programs to get help for some steps.

- Empty your manure storage. Maximize storage capacity for winter by emptying storage facilities and properly applying manure. Do not spread manure when rain is forecast.
- Plant fall cover crops. Reduce nutrient losses from fall applications by planting a cover crop that can make use of the nitrogen in manure and reduce erosion.
- Develop a nutrient management plan. Make wise use of nutrients and reduce risks by tapping into technical help and resources to prepare a plan.
- Develop a winter spreading plan. For farms with limited or no storage, work with your local conservation staff or professional agronomist to help identify fields with a lower risk of runoff.

For more technical or program information on manure management or winter spreading plans, call your local NRCS office or county land conservation office, Leavenworth says. More information on manure runoff, the prevention campaign, and efforts to find new ways to manage manure can be found online at http://dnr.wi.gov/news/mediakits/mk_manure_runoff.asp.

Manure spill response demonstration set for Oct. 14 in the Wisconsin Dells

Producers and nutrient applicators are encouraged to attend a manure spill response demonstration set for Oct. 14 in the Wisconsin Dells. The demonstration runs from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the NelDell Farm, W13615 Nelson Road, in the Wisconsin Dells, and is sponsored by the Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin, Columbia County UW-Extension, Columbia County Land & Water Conservation, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources’ spills and runoff management programs. Staff from those agencies will demonstrate several manure spill containment methods, will cover reporting requirements, and will answer any questions that attendees may have.

The rain date is Oct. 16 at 1 p.m. If in doubt, call (608) 742-9688 or visit <http://columbia.uwex.edu> on Oct. 14 to learn if the event will be held.