Natural Rendering: A Natural Solution For Mortality and Butcher Waste

By Jean Bonhotal

Are you paying double for disposal of animal carcasses? First you have the economic loss of the animal, then you must pay the renderer up to $70 for a cow, $60 for a pig, and $200 for a horse! On-site composting of mortalities and butcher waste has emerged as a money-saving, environmentally sound alternative for many farm businesses.

The rendering industry has been providing the valuable services of mortality pickup from farms and residuals from many butchers for as long as we can remember. But recent declines in the prices of hides, tallow, meat and bone meal, and other products as well as mad cow and foot and mouth diseases have hit the rendering industry economically. Where at one time these products were paid for, the rendering industry has been forced to charge for service. The rising prices of rendering services have made it unaffordable for many farms and butchers.

Butchers and livestock producers sometimes are unaware of proper disposal methods outside of rendering services. In an anonymous survey we found improper disposal methods to be common. Allowing carcasses to decay above ground (and be scavenged by wild animals,) or buried (which is difficult at certain times of year,) can potentially contaminate surface and groundwater. These practices can also pose biosecurity threats to livestock.

Composting of livestock mortality and butcher residuals is a convenient, biosecure, socially acceptable and environmentally responsible method of disposal. In addition, parts and animals not normally accepted by rendering services can be composted.

KEY POINTS ABOUT CARCASS COMPOSTING:

- Select a site that is well-drained, and at least 200 feet from water courses, sinkholes, seasonal seeps or other landscape features that indicate the area is hydrologically sensitive.
- Lay a 2-foot deep bed of bulky, organic material containing small, useful size pieces (4-6 inches long).
- Utility and municipal wood chips work well.

Making Money With Firewood

By Paul Bock

It is possible to earn supplemental income by producing and selling firewood without even owning a piece of woodland. Several factors worked in my favor to allow me to do this, and to satisfy a unique niche market for firewood.

I work in Buffalo, New York, and live in a rented farmhouse on an idle dairy farm an hour southwest of Buffalo. I don't own any woodland. Yet, each fall I sell 20 to 50 face cords of firewood in Buffalo at nearly twice the local price. I cut, split, and cure the wood at home, then deliver it to customers after work. It would not be very economical to deliver wood this far away if I didn't have the means to. The profits from the firewood make the long commute a little easier on the wallet.

I was first hooked on splitting firewood when I spent two summers working for a residential tree service. I learned to use different sized chainsaws, splitting mauls, hydraulic splitters, heavy equipment and techniques for dragging, skidding, and hauling wood.

Two years ago I started a firewood business, called Stone Gully Firewood. When my landlord logged a section of his 200 acres of Sugar Maples, which left hardwood tops in the woods. That first year I used a pickup truck, a chainsaw, a chainsaw, and a splitting maul. A classified ad in a Buffalo newspaper sold 50 cords the first year.

Since then, I have made arrangements with woodland owners to cut their hardwood tops after the logger is done. My work keeps the woods clean and gives the owner a little extra money. I also have an arrangement with a nearby sawmill that sells me their culls. While the culls aren't high grade, they are great for firewood. I cut them at the sawmill to avoid transportation costs and keep their load clean.

Equipment requirements can vary quite a bit. At the sawmill, I can drive right up with a two-wheel drive pickup. In the woodlot, it may be necessary to have a 4x4 truck or a tractor. Sometimes you will have to leave usable wood in the forest because it is too difficult to harvest.

There was a time when I bought tractors and equipment because I thought it would speed up production. In the end, those pieces of equipment were capital expenses that eventually broke, which took time and money to fix. A good rule is to keep it simple. I have found that the less equipment I own the more firewood I produce. A good, all-purpose tool would be a 4x4 pickup that can get around the woods easily, can haul the wood, and can deliver it to customers.

I prefer to use a splitting maul instead of a hydraulic splitter. I learned how wood splits when I worked for the tree service, and a hydraulic splitter made those lessons easy. But now I am faster with a chainsaw than using a hydraulic splitter. I get a backache lifting the big wood onto the splitter or moving it to the splitter. You could move the splitter around, but often that is more work than moving the wood to the splitter.

To break up the time I spend splitting, I switch to other activities like toasting wood in the truck, and limbing and bucking out the next top. You get into a nice rhythm, which makes the work go quickly. Each blow of the chainsaw is like a percussion note against the orchestra of the woods. I breathe enough exhaust smoke from my chainsaw, I don't need more of it from my splitter.

It is important to know your market. I have found that I can divide my customers into two groups. The rural folks have wood burning stoves, furnaces, and boilers that provide heat in the winter. They need large pieces of wood to fill up large fireboxes. They want to be able to bank the fire over night so that it is still burning in the morning. The urban folks have fireplaces and small fireplace inserts. They want their wood split small so that it will burn well. They want uniform length wood that is well seasoned, with a light color and good checking. For the urban folks, the appearance of the wood stacked against their house is a part of the decoration, adding to the rustic charm of their suburban home.

Niche marketing success depends on the entrepreneurial spirit of the owner, careful planning, and business acumen resulting from special circumstances. Once you succeed, you can build on that knowledge to grow your business.

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