

**STEWARDSHIP AND NATURE**

# 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 service 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,



Building the compost pile.

and other products as well as mad cow and foot and mouth diseases have hurt 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, absorbing organic material containing some sizeable pieces (4-6 inches long). Utility and municipal wood chips work well.

- Cover the carcass with a dry, high-carbon co-composting material, such as old silage, sawdust, or dry stall bedding (some semi-solid manure will expedite the process)
- For young animals, layer mortalities with a minimum of 2 foot of co-composting material.
- Let set for 4-6 months.
- Remove large bones before land-applying compost

Even a 30,000-pound Northern Right whale was composted in New York State. The equipment needed to compost is available on most farms, and can be done at any time of year. It should be noted that some states have enacted environmental regulations for composting, so check with environmental regulators to see if it is legal in your state.

The Cornell Waste Management Institute (CWMI) has produced new educational materials on natural rendering, including a 20-minute video and 12-page fact sheet. Both the fact sheet and the video explain the basics of carcass and butcher waste composting, including the key points such as siting, proper layering depths, materials and how to monitor the pile as well as troubleshooting tips. The fact sheet can be viewed online at: <http://compost.css.cornell.edu/NaturalRenderingFS.pdf>.

CWMI is also offering the Advanced Compost Short Course in Ithaca, NY, October 27-28, 2003, plus an optional Tour on the 26th. For more information visit the CWMI web site at: <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu>.

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