



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

Amish Manure Management

It is easy to view small diversified Amish farms, utilizing traditional farming methods and draft horses, as an anachronism -- a part of our rural past. However, while in many areas of the country farm numbers are declining, the Amish, every year, establish new successful farming communities, in over 30 states. Specific data is not available, but it is likely that in terms of farm numbers, the Amish represent one of the fastest-growing segments of the national agricultural industry. A typical Amish farm often has about 50 tillable acres, several draft horses or mules, dairy cows and a variety of other livestock. The methods and equipment used on Amish farms is largely dictated by the ordnung (spoken rules) of each church district. These rules vary somewhat between church districts within a settlement, and more widely between different settlements. Recent changes in some settlements, specifically permitting the use of milking machines, have allowed some Amish dairy farms to add cows. In these areas herds of over 30 cows are now common. However, permitted manure handling equipment, and available land for spreading, is highly variable. Some Amish communities allow mechanical barn cleaners, while others do not. Some allow skid steer loaders, but most do not. In some areas liquid manure systems are common, in others they are unknown. Some farmers can use government cost share dollars to build storage, while others are forbidden to accept these dollars. The open, box type solid manure spreader continues to be the most common storage structure found on Amish farms. This presentation will explore current and emerging issues of manure management on Amish farms. In addition, it will assist professionals working with these farms, in understanding the labyrinth of rules that dictate manure management options in this remarkably fast-growing segment of our farm community.

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