Options in a Wet Spring

This year’s spring weather has the livestock industry and manure applicators scrambling to prevent and deal with problems. Many applicators are hauling from one storage structure to another, land applying small amounts on high spots, and other innovative strategies.

A few points to keep in mind:
- Roads are likely to be softer and damage is more likely.
- Additional capacity to a pit **can not be added** (i.e. a 6 inch berm at the top) without a permit from the County Land and Water Conservation Department (most counties require permits)
- Be careful to avoid creating ruts in the top and sides of manure storages.
- Work with the farmer and agronomist to choose the fields to apply to once it does begin to dry up. Applying manure to fields that are the last to dry up anyway may not be the best option this year.

Many farmers will need to think about topdressing manure on alfalfa this summer. Below are some considerations you and the farmer should keep in mind when using this option.

Manure Topdressed After Alfalfa Cutting

Topdressed applications of manure are sometimes made on recently harvested alfalfa fields because of the necessity to spread manure during the summer months. Applying manure to established alfalfa does offer the ability to spread manure in the summer and provides a means to utilize “on-farm” nutrient sources rather than purchased commercial fertilizer. Both research trials and farmer experiences have been mixed using this strategy of manure application to alfalfa. In some cases, yields have been increased and no detrimental impacts to alfalfa plants were noted. In other situations, both stand and yield reductions have occurred. Damage and reductions have been attributed to:
- Manure salts and free ammonia causing damage to new alfalfa regrowth.
- Plant crown or shoot damage from wheel tracks.
- Soil compaction (especially if soils are wet) from manure application equipment.
- Plant smothering (mostly a problem with solid manure).

The other potential disadvantage to applying manure on established alfalfa is odor. With no option to work the manure into the soil, public relations with nearby neighbors are sometimes a concern.
Manure Topdressed After Alfalfa Cutting (continued).

If the need exists to apply manure to established alfalfa, follow these guidelines:

- The tanker should follow the forage wagon. Application should be done as soon as the alfalfa is off the field, as regrowth begins as soon as the alfalfa is cut.

- Make applications immediately after harvest to reduce the risk of plant damage from both salt burn and wheel track damage. UW research has confirmed that wheel track damage to alfalfa is significantly greater after five days of regrowth compared to three.

- Skip applications if soils are wet to reduce soil compaction damage. Choose drier fields for application if at all possible.

- Target older stands where there is less to lose if plant damage does occur. Additionally, older stands often have more grasses or weeds that contribute to yield and less prone to damage from manure applications.

- Don’t apply more than 3,000-5,000 gallons per acre of liquid manure or about 10 tons of solid dairy manure. Also keep in mind that burn potential is a function of manure ammonium nitrogen and salt content. These vary with manure type and source.

- Apply manure uniformly across field to reduce the risk of injury to the growing crop.

Does applying manure on established alfalfa affect palatability or silage quality?

There is no evidence to suggest that applying manure to harvested alfalfa fields impacts the palatability of the next crop. Research also suggests that manure applications have a low risk of altering the fermentation qualities of the crop. There is evidence to suggest that in some situations there may be a lower population of naturally occurring lactic acid bacteria. For this reason, it’s advisable to use a silage inoculant containing lactic acid bacteria.

Sources: http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/ManureAlfQual.html http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/AlfManureFOF.htm

Performance Standard Update:

If you have not yet returned the Gold, Silver, Bronze checklist, please do so soon. Firms that requested an extension to calibrate equipment (as it has not been possible to do yet this spring given field conditions) should submit those forms as soon as complete.

Please note, this web site: http://www.wimanuremgt.org/ will be moving to a new location on June 1, 2011. The new web site address will be:

http://fyi.uwex.edu/wimanuremgt/

For info on the 2011 Manure Expo, visit www.manureexpo.org