

HORSE MANURE MANAGEMENT



The proper disposal of animal waste is a challenge for every horse operation. Many stable owners consider the waste from stalls to be a nuisance because it attracts flies and is unsightly. Because of this perception, stable waste (manure plus bedding) has been improperly disposed of in remote areas on the farm, such as gullies, wood edges, and over the hillside. This method of disposal poses significant environmental risks due to runoff and leaching of nutrients from the manure that may contaminate ground and surface water. The Water Quality Improvement Act of 1998 requires Maryland horse operations to address the proper disposal and utilization of stable waste.

Stable waste can be handled in two ways:

1) REMOVE FROM THE PREMISES

Removal may be an added expense to the operation. However, the cost can often be passed on with small increases in boarding or other fees. Removal of waste from the farm can be accomplished through various avenues. Neighbors may be willing to pick up small amounts in the spring and fall for gardens, but this method is not always reliable. Some companies will come to your facility and remove waste for a fee, such as a manure removal firm, an excavating contractor, or a landscaper. Some enterprises will issue “roll off” boxes that can be filled with stable waste and later removed for a fee. Removal services range in price from \$4.00/cu. yd. to \$15.00/cu. yd. Proper storage of stable waste is essential to protect water quality. NOTE: A 1000 lb. horse stabled 50% of the time will produce 1-2 cu. ft. per day of stable waste. That’s 1-2 cu. yds/month. These volumes may vary between barns due to the type of horse and bedding used, time of year, and the management of the stable. Regardless of where they’re kept, horses produce 50 lbs of manure a day.

2) SPREAD ON PASTURE, HAY OR CROP FIELDS

Spreading stable waste on the land does not meet everyone’s needs. There must be enough acreage to accommodate the waste, and the application rate must meet the recommendations of an approved nutrient management plan. Application of raw stable waste to land also has disadvantages:

- Stable waste may contain a variety of internal parasites, bacteria and viruses that can reinfect the herd when applied to pastures or hay fields.
- Waste should only be spread in the fall and spring. Making numerous trips over fields throughout the year causes soil compaction. Compaction reduces water infiltration and retards the growth of pasture and hay grasses.

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REAL-LIFE TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Composting is a biological process where microorganisms convert organic materials such as manure, leaves, sawdust, straw, and paper into a soil-like material called compost. There are advantages to composting your stable waste:

1. Volume reduction - composting reduces the volume of stable waste by 40-60%.
2. Composting is environmentally friendly. It converts nutrients into a form that is more readily available for plant uptake.
3. Compost adds organic matter to the soil, improving soil fertility and moisture retention and increasing the yield potential of pasture and hay grasses.
4. Compost is a value-added product and has many different uses. It can be spread over pasture and hay fields to improve grass production, used in the garden, or landscaping.

For more helpful information on composting, read our Composting Horse Manure fact sheet on mda.maryland.gov/HOW, or contact your local Soil Conservation District or University of Maryland Extension office.

For more information on horse manure management and other soil conservation and water quality practices, contact your local Soil Conservation District or visit mda.maryland.gov/HOW.

The Horse Outreach Workgroup (HOW) provides information to horse owners on pasture and manure management. HOW consists of representatives from local Soil Conservation Districts, the Maryland Department of Agriculture, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maryland Extension, Maryland Horse Council, and the Maryland Horse Industry Board.

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