

# Timing matters when it comes to manure application

Peer-to-peer project urges hog farmers to think about when they spread manure

BY LILIAN SCHAER

ONTARIO HOG FARMERS are working with other agricultural organizations and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to address spreading manure on frozen or snow covered ground.

Applying manure to fields at the right time – such as during the growing season rather than winter – means more nutrients stay in the soil and are kept out of streams, rivers and lakes where they can have a negative impact on the environment.

Phosphorous run-off has received particular attention in the Lake Erie basin, where algal blooms in the lake have attracted considerable media coverage.

A 2012 report by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks had shown that more than 80 per cent of the phosphorous and nitrogen run-off measured in streams actually occurred outside of the growing season.

Recent OMAFRA research has shown that rainfall and thawing events during the winter months are more common than generally thought, resulting in a high potential for run-off that gives nutrients a clear conduit to enter water courses instead of staying on the ground.

University of Waterloo student Nidhi Gupta has been working on a project to evaluate weather and flow rate data for McKenzie Creek near Caledonia over a 10-year period.

“There are high flow rates occurring in the winter and they are consistent over winter periods, it’s not just a one-year event,” she explained.

“When we lined up the data, we found that there is usually a high temperature event with loss of snow, then a high rainfall event and then a large peak of flow rate in the river.”

Taking a proactive approach to phosphorous reduction and nutrient application led Ontario Pork last year to join Beef Farmers of Ontario, Egg Farmers of Ontario, Dairy Farmers of Ontario, Turkey Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Sheep Farmers, Grain Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, National Farmers Union, Ontario Professional Agri-Contractors Association, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, and Farm & Food Care Ontario in what is called the Timing Matters Peer to Peer outreach initiative.

The goal is to raise awareness about winter manure spreading and encouraging producers to plan ahead for their

nutrient needs, according to pork producer Mike Mitchell who chairs the project committee.

“All observations (of winter spreading) that were sighted were passed on to the respective commodity organization to contact the producer,” Mitchell explained.

“A producer representative of the commodity organization then made a direct call to the producer involved to have a conversation producer to producer about why they were doing what they were doing, and what could be done to help make better choices.”

“Farmers want to do the right thing, so these were generally very constructive discussions,” he added. And the project has been a good news story for Ontario’s pork industry so far.

According to Mitchell, only a tiny fraction of the 31 reported cases in the Lake Erie basin stemmed from hog farms, which is a testament to the widespread awareness and commitment to environmental stewardship in the industry.

This article is provided by Livestock Research Innovation Corporation as part of LRIC’s ongoing efforts to report on Canadian livestock research developments and outcomes. 