Properly managing and disposing of dead farm animals is a basic legal responsibility for animal management and environmental protection. The PA Domestic Animal Law defines acceptable disposal methods, which include mortality composting, rendering, incineration and burial. Livestock and poultry operations need a strategy for proper disposal of routine losses and should utilize these acceptable methods. When catastrophic losses occur, disposal will be handled under the direction of the PA Department of Agriculture.

**PA Domestic Animal Law**

The PA Domestic Animal Law lists legal requirements for poultry and livestock operations. Responsible parties must:
- Properly dispose of the carcass within 48 hours.
- Prevent exposure of the carcass to other living animals, domestic animals and the public.
- Minimize environmental impact and not endanger animal or public health while transporting deadstock.
- Be licensed by the PA Department of Agriculture to commercially transport and dispose of deadstock and poultry.

Having a strategy to handle mortalities before they happen can help an emotional situation be a little easier.

**DISPOSAL STRATEGY**

Disposal strategies must consider practical details.
- Could the disposal method impact your herd or flock’s health, safety and bio-security?
- Proximity to your own or neighboring wells.
- Distance to closest surface water.
- Where will you access enough carbon material for composting?
- Can your neighbors see your disposal method or site? Will they find it offensive?
- Is your equipment heavy enough to move large animals and soil?
- Are farm soils suitable for underground disposal?

**CATASTROPHIC MORTALITY**

The information and techniques in this brochure are intended as guidance for routine animal mortalities on a farm. In situations involving catastrophic mortality, such as whole herd or flock due to disease or catastrophic events, please contact the PA Department of Agriculture Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services at 717-772-2852 for additional information and instructions.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Contact your local Penn State Extension, County Conservation District or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office for assistance.


Penn State Extension Composting Page extension.psu.edu/animals/health/composting

PA Agricultural Ombudsman Program
Eastern PA 717-880-0848
Western PA 814-696-0877, ext. 113 www.paagombudsman.com

PA Department of Agriculture
www.agriculture.pa.gov

PA USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrsc/site/pa/home/

Penn State Extension extension.psu.edu

PA Department of Environmental Protection www.dep.pa.gov. Click on “Regional Resources”, then “Office locations” for DEP offices in your area.

Published by the PA Agricultural Ombudsman Program. Special thanks to the PA Department of Agriculture, Penn State Extension, PA Department of Environmental Protection, PA Farm Bureau, State Conservation Commission, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Perish Industries and PA Center for Dairy Excellence.

**Livestock & Poultry MORTALITY DISPOSAL in Pennsylvania**

Disposing of uncovered animals on the ground to decompose or be eaten by scavengers is not legal nor professional.
Dead animals should not be visible to the general housing. Take extra care with biosecurity to prevent up should be located away from the main animal as a disposal option for your farm. Rendering pick-what will be accepted before planning on rendering presents biosecurity concerns. CALL FIRST to see requires minimal labor. It can be expensive and RENDERING:

1. constructed, covered structures (especially for smaller animals, with frequent mortalities)
2. static piles (for minimal number of large animals)
3. enclosed vessels (which speed up the process for larger animals, when experiencing frequent mortalities).

When burying or composting, you may lance the rumen of large animals. More composting information can be found at http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/mortality.htm or contact your local PennState Extension office.

LEGAL DISPOSAL METHODS

MORTALITY COMPOSTING:

Composting breaks down organic matter into a stable material, after reaching temperatures high enough to kill bacteria and viruses. When managed properly, composting is convenient, affordable and requires minimal labor. Properly managed composting facilities do not have problems with rodents, predators, flies or odors. Composting can be done in:
1. constructed, covered structures (especially for smaller animals, with frequent mortalities)
2. static piles (for minimal number of large animals)
3. windrows (is the best shape for internal air flow)
4. enclosed vessels (which speed up the process for larger animals, when experiencing frequent mortalities).

INCINERATION:

In-vessel composters provide a controlled environment for a consistent, year-round finished product. It often reduces time to complete the composting process. There is no potential for runoff and may be more visually appealing than piles or rows.

INCINERATION:

In-cellar incineration is convenient, especially for smaller animals, but can be expensive, time consuming, and may create odors. Incineration requires an enclosed unit specifically designed for this purpose. The best incinerators have the burner above the animal(s) or are fitted with a flue after-burner to eliminate smoke. Open-air burning is not an acceptable disposal method. Ag operations are currently exempt from air quality regulations on the farm premises, unless the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says otherwise. Local municipalities have authority to regulate air quality. Check with your local municipality before you incinerate.

LANDFILLING:

Landfilling is a form of burial. When transporting carcasses to landfills, the appropriate biosecurity protocols must be followed in order to minimize potential for spreading disease. Not all landfills are licensed to accept animal mortalities. CALL FIRST to be sure a landfill can accept your particular animal type(s) and weight(s).

LANDFILLING:

Identify burial sites on maps or in GPS for future reference. Re-vegetate with grass once the burial site is closed. Farmers are encouraged to seek technical assistance from a local County Conservation District, Penn State Extension, or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to help determine the best burial site(s) on the farm.

By law, burial sites must be:
• located outside of the 100-yr flood plain.
• a minimum of 100 ft from waters of the Commonwealth (streams, ponds, wetlands, etc.).
• 200 ft is recommended.
• covered with minimum 2 ft of soil within 48 hours.

Burial sites should be:
• Located minimum 100 ft from wells and sinkholes. 200 ft is recommended.
• at least 100 ft from property lines. 200 ft is recommended.
• away from public view.

Bottom of burial site should be:
• at least 2 ft above bedrock.
• at least 2 ft above seasonal high water table.
• at least 2 ft above highly permeable soils.

GOOD NEIGHBOR RELATIONS:

GOOD NEIGHBOR RELATIONS:

Farmers need to consider their neighbors. Even legal disposal methods can become an issue if you do not consider the impact on neighbors. Visibility and odors associated with agriculture are often the root of many conflicts or complaints. It is best to keep a visual screen such as tree buffers around farm buildings, burial sites, incinerators and mortality composting sites in order to minimize the impacts of sights and odors. It is also a good neighbor practice to ensure mortality composting or burial sites have at least the required two (2) feet of cover. This prevents odor issues and bio-security hazards for you and your neighbors.