

Free registry connects farmers to buy and sell manure

The maximum value is in farms up to eight or nine kilometers apart

By Lilian Schaer



A tough fall of 2018 was the catalyst for the development of Crop Quest's online manure registry, a free service where farmers can register if they have extra manure or are looking for manure for their land

FOR LIVESTOCK FARMERS, MANURE can pose some significant challenges, especially on larger farms. Manure is a great fertilizer source, but it can be a challenge for farmers who have more than their fields need or their soil's phosphorus levels are rising.

Instead of looking at excess manure as a nuisance that needs dealing with, some nutrient management specialists are highlighting the economic value of manure in an effort to encourage a new way of thinking about it.

Manure testing is a good way to establish the nutrient value of a farm's manure, which will help reduce commercial fertilizer costs. It's also a good way to establish a value for potential sale of a product that builds

soil organic matter while also providing essential macro- and micro-nutrients and supporting critical soil biology.

Some farmers have started making arrangements with other farmers in their area, like cash croppers without livestock, to apply manure to their crop land.

Andy de Vries has been buying manure for his cash crop farm south of Mitchell for years from two nearby livestock farms and appreciates the micro-nutrients and organic matter contents of manure not found in commercial fertilizer.

His average cost is \$40 to 60 per acre to apply manure, depending on the analysis and type of livestock the manure comes from. When buying liquid

manure, they sample every hour during pumping to make a composite sample that is sent to the lab, and pay the selling farmer based on the resulting potassium and phosphorus values.

De Vries is also a partner in Crop Quest, and when Fall 2018's challenging weather made it difficult to get fall field work like manure application completed, he began to think about how farmers could help each other address the surplus manure question.

That was the catalyst for the development of Crop Quest's online manure registry, a free service where farmers can register if they have extra manure or are looking for manure for their land.

"The whole idea of the registry is to

link people closely – the maximum value is in farms up to eight or nine kilometers apart,” explains de Vries.

“It’s a matter of people recognizing the value of manure. There are thousands of acres that have never seen manure and they’re the ones that could benefit the most,” he adds. “The idea is to get more awareness of the value of manure out there.”

De Vries worked with Christine Brown, Field Crop Sustainability Specialist at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), to develop the site. It’s an information service only, with participating farmers responsible for making all of their own arrangements related to buying or selling manure. It’s open to anyone to use, not just Crop Quest customers.

Now in development is an app that will automate record-keeping needed for nutrient management plan compliance. Manure applicators simply update the

app with how much manure was applied on which field on which day. It’s an idea de Vries says came from some large operators who frequently apply manure and are looking for a solution to help streamline record-keeping.

This all feeds into Brown’s concept of neighbourhood nutrient management plans based on local soil fertility levels. Applying additional nutrients to a field with high fertility levels is like putting money into a savings account with low interest, she believes: the nutrients are valuable, but aren’t needed by the crop until the “savings are drawn down”.

According to Brown, a neighbourhood plan is developed cooperatively with livestock and cash crop farms. Ideally, a third-party nutrient management or 4R consultant would complete the paperwork, with maps, crop rotation schedules, manure analyses and soil tests from cooperating farms.

“Farms receiving manure could trade

straw and/or pay the cost of the fertilizer equivalent value of available nutrients in exchange for micronutrients and organic matter,” she explains, adding the livestock farmer would receive financial benefit for nutrients that would otherwise take many years to provide a payback.

Long-term neighbourhood plans could explore opportunities like additional storage facilities or even pipelines so manure can be applied from a central location to lower transportation costs and road issues.

More information about manure stewardship and long-term nutrient management options is available at <https://www.farmfoodcareon.org/timing-matters/>. **D**

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