



Agricultural Environmental Management

Clean Barnyards Benefit Livestock, Neighbors & the Environment

By Barbara Silvestri

You might say we've saved the best for last! Last year we started off our series on New York's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program by listing several AEM worksheets that many small farms find helpful. These worksheets guide farmers in assessing the ways their farm is benefiting the environment and identifying any pollution risks that might exist. In recent issues we've discussed most of those core worksheet topics, and in this issue we'll look at one of the most popular: Barnyard Management.

For many small farms, the barnyard is the center of the action. Often minor changes in barnyard management can have a big impact on how the farm impacts the environment. The *AEM Barnyard Management Worksheet* helps farmers take a careful look at their barnyard set-up to identify any pollution risks that might exist. Completing this confidential assessment can help match farmers with resources to improve barnyards and reduce potential risks.

Barnyards are an important area to examine because when livestock waste is concentrated (as it is in barnyards, holding areas or feedlots) the danger of pollutants reaching surface water or groundwater increases. Livestock waste contains high levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, sediments, degradable organic materials and microbes, which can pollute surface water and groundwater.

In general, good barnyard management involves two basic principles:

1. ***Keep clean water clean!*** Divert clean runoff from roofs and the land area above the barnyard away from the barnyard.
2. ***Treat the dirty water!*** Catch and treat or store contaminated runoff.

Improving barnyard management can have lots of benefits for farms. Reducing wetness, mud and manure under animals' feet can improve the herd's health. Reducing odors can improve neighbor relations, an issue that many farms struggle with. And of course, pure groundwater and clean surface water bodies are critical for drinking water, recreation, tourism and healthy ecosystems.

Barnyard management is not one-size-fits-all. The location of the barnyard, its proximity to waterbodies and the soil that lies beneath it can all affect the risk of water pollution. There is a greater chance of livestock waste affecting surface water if the barnyard is located close to a down-slope watercourse or waterbody. There is a greater risk of the barnyard affecting groundwater if the barnyard is located over sandy or gravelly soil, if groundwater or bedrock is near the surface, or if polluted runoff from the barnyard flows directly onto permeable soil or bedrock.

Conducting a free, confidential AEM Risk Assessment, including the *Barnyard Management Worksheet*, will help you take a careful look at your barnyard's location, size, and runoff management system. An AEM professional brings expertise on soil types and runoff control, and can help you identify potential pollution risks and connect you with resources to reduce them.

Call your county Soil and Water Conservation District today to schedule a free, confidential AEM Risk Assessment for your farm, including the *Barnyard Management Worksheet*! To learn more about AEM, view the Worksheets, including the *Barnyard Management Worksheet*, or to locate your Conservation District office, visit: www.nys-soilandwater.org.

Stay tuned for the next issue to find out how AEM is helping New York farmers get the word out about their efforts to lead the nation in conservation!