



Kansas State University

What to Do With Dead Livestock?

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Whether we like it or not, every farm will have a dead animal now and then. In Kansas you can legally dispose of dead animals by: burial, incineration, rendering or composting. Burial in good weather can be difficult, when it's raining or the ground is frozen it can be impossible. Incineration is really not an option, and rendering plants will not pick up animals over 30 months old. Composting is an environmentally sound and cost effective method of disposal.

In the state of Kansas, composting sites that are used infrequently, must be on hard surfaces. This can be either concrete or clay, downstream from streams or creeks and in a place that runoff will be filtered. The laws on the state statutes pertain to those composting lots of animals. Individuals composting an animal every once in awhile do not have to have a registration or permit.

Most farms, ranches or feeding operations normally have all of the necessary materials and equipment on hand to have a successful composting site. Scraped manure, spilled or spoiled feed, and chopped hay or corn stalks can be used in the composting.

After you've chosen the site, good solid ground or concrete, with little runoff potential or managed runoff, lay down a base of 24 inches of absorbent material (wood shavings, sawdust, straw, etc). Place the dead animal on top of this layer. If you can water down the carcass, you will give the microbes a jump start to decomposing. Cover the carcass with additional pile material. During the composting process, microbes on the carcass break down the tissue into a stable organic residue while producing heat, moisture, and carbon dioxide.

Moisture in the pile, ensures that microbial activity will generate heat to effectively kill pathogens and weed seeds in the pile. Internal pile temperatures of 120 to 160 degrees F indicate successful heating. Typically, an initial 90-day heating cycle is needed before turning the pile. At this point you can add either more material and moisture, if needed and allow the pile to have a second heating cycle. When the pile is turned, most of the bones will break into smaller pieces which disappear in the next heating cycle. Sometimes a third heating cycle may be needed for large carcasses. Large carcasses can take up to nine months to fully decompose.

Most of the co-composting material will not be broken down and can either be reused in the next cycle or spread on cropland.

Many thanks to Ken Powell, KDHE for reviewing this fact sheet.

Resources used: Livestock (Dead Animal) Composting, KDHE-Bureau of Waste Management, November 2003

Temporary Bin Composting, www.eXtension.org

Disposal Options for Small Quantities of Dead Animals

<http://www.kdheks.gov/waste/techguide/SW-1994-G1.pdf> and Disposal Options

for Large Quantities of Dead Animals

<http://www.kdheks.gov/waste/techguide/SW-2001-G1.pdf>.

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