GROWER OPTIONS FOR SPENT LITTER MANAGEMENT

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SHORT COMMUNICATION

The chicken meat industry produces large volumes of low value by-product in the form of spent litter (poultry litter) annually. Recent estimates suggest over 1 M tonnes is produced annually, with the majority being utilised as a fertiliser replacement in the horticulture, dairy, grazing and broad acre industries. The industry is interested in maximising the value of poultry litter either through traditional uses, or by turning to new avenues such as energy generation. Reuse (using litter for multiple batches of chickens) is also an option for reducing the costs associated with litter and producing a potentially more saleable product with higher fertiliser value.

A considerable amount of industry research has been focussed on investigating approaches to improve litter management and utilisation. To provide this information in an accessible form, a project was initiated to develop three guidelines on poultry litter utilisation. These guidelines (to be available from RIRDC chicken meat program in October 2012) include: i) land application of poultry litter, ii) energy generation from poultry litter, and iii) reusing poultry litter.

These guidelines highlight the findings from the many research projects and are available in an 'easy to access' format that summarises the information. An additional report will be available summarising the literature on these topics. Below is brief summary of material covered.

Land Application

The land application guideline will cover the characteristics of poultry litter (nutrient content, carbon), practicalities with spreading litter, including setting application rates, valuing litter when selling this material off farm or for those who plan to purchase litter and research results from poultry litter trials in grazing and cropping. The guide will cover management requirements to handle potential risks associated with litter use (pathogens, heavy metals, weeds, environment).

Energy Generation

Energy generation from poultry litter is an area receiving increased interest from the industry. The guideline will cover the characteristics of poultry litter that suit energy generation (energy content, moisture, ash, volatile solids) and will provide an overview of the most promising technologies available, and the state of the technology. This guide is aimed at providing an introduction to the topic for chicken meat growers and companies.

Reuse Guideline

This guideline provides recent research findings investigating the practice of reusing poultry litter for multiple batches of chickens. The guide covers the advantages, limitations and management needs for reusing litter.

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