They Use Manure To Bed Their Cows

"Most people not familiar with livestock just shake their heads in amazement when they learn that we're using compost made from manure for bedding our dairy cattle," says Brad Vold, one of the family members operating Dorrich Dairy in Glenwood, Minn. The bedding concept is popular in Europe, but there are only a few dairies using it in the U.S.

A large rotating drum about 6 ft. in diameter and about 32 ft. long has a hopper at one end to receive material, and a conveyor at the opposite end to remove it. Manure, plus feed that's refused by cattle, is mixed together in the composter to provide the finished product. The Dorrich operation had their system installed in September, 2016 in a large bay of their barn that used to hold their cattle bedding. After 6 mos. the system is working well and is mostly a "hands off" operation.

Vold says their system is different than a digester because manure is separated before it enters the composting drum. Theirs is an aerobic system that isn't sealed. After separation the solids are conveyed to the drum, along with small amounts of refused feed that their cattle don't eat. A batch of product remains in the composter about 25 hrs. and heats to about 130 to 150 degrees. Material leaves the drum at about 64 to 66 percent moisture and is piled at one end of the barn. The Volds bed their cattle 6 days a week and say the livestock are extremely comfortable, even in cold weather.

Before installing their own composter the Volds used to purchase about 80 semi-loads of digested manure solids annually from a large nearby dairy. When that supply line dried up after 8 years, the Volds had just 7 months to come up with an alternate plan. "We looked at straw, sand, shavings and green solids, but we would've had to change our manure system and the costs were too much for our operation," Vold says. "Installing our own composting system worked from the economic standpoint, so that's the route we chose." The system is on a 10-year payback, and Vold says after 6 months everything is on track.

Output is about 60 tons a week, which is almost twice as much product as they need. Excess material is sold for $200 a semi load, which, even after the $1,000 in electric charges needed to run the machine are considered, allows the operation to earn about $800 a month. The composter runs automatically with monitors to assure constant operation. If there's a problem, Vold says they can access the system controls through a cell phone application and correct it.

The composter has provided other benefits besides economics and the ability to produce their own bedding. Bacteria count in their bedding is down, which has kept their somatic cell count in a very favorable range of 150,000. They've lowered their use of fresh water, which means their lagoon isn't filling quite as fast as it used to. Vold says water savings may add up to 1 million gallons a year. The extra manure storage space will allow for an additional 25 milk cows to provide extra revenue.

Dorrich Dairy uses compost made from manure to bed their cattle. A large rotating drum receives material and a conveyor at the opposite end removes it.

The 425-cow Dorrich Dairy is owned and operated by Dorothy and Richard Vold, Brad and Suzanne Vold, and Greg Vold. The younger Volds are the 4th generation to operate the land, which began when Richard's grandparents began farming there in 1899. "We've got quite a history going here, and we want to have it continue for years to come," says Brad.

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Manure, plus feed refused by cattle, is mixed together in composter to provide the finished product.

Hunting Blind Looks Like Hay Bale

Michael Barabash of Westlock, Alta., built two hunting blinds that most folks couldn't spot in a field of round bales.

"I bow hunt and found that I couldn't buy the specific type of blind that I wanted," he explains. "I got the idea on the internet to build a blind that looks like a round bale."

Barabash says his 6-ft. tall by 5-ft. wide bale blind leaves plenty of elbow room for more than one hunter and does a great job of protecting him from the elements. It also masks his scent from animals' sensitive noses.

"You can set them out anywhere and either sit or stand inside," he says. "I used the blinds for white tail hunting in 2016 and had deer walking within 30 ft. of me. The blinds look and smell natural because of what they're made of."

Barabash built the blind's frame by bending metal hog panels and welding them to a rectangular base made of 1 1/2-in. angle iron. Because the unit has no floor, Barabash says he can re-position it mid-hunt, if needed.

"If you're inside and want to change your angle of view for any reason, it's easy to just pick it up and move it," he says.

Barabash covered each frame with black landscaping cloth to darken the interior, and then added a layer of black poly for waterproofing. The third layer is a material normally used as anti-erosion matting, and is made of straw and coconut husks sewn in between two pieces of netting.

There is a 2-ft. wide hinged door on one end of the blind and drop-down, hinged windows on the sides. Barabash staggered the windows on opposite sides so the animals can't see daylight through the back side of the blind if both windows happen to be open.

The challenge in building the blinds was figuring out how to secure everything to the frame. He used twine to tie each layer on, and then added 3 rounds of netwrap as the finishing touch.

"It took two of us at least 20 to 30 hrs. each to build the two blinds, and the materials cost me about $500 total," Barabash explains. "Each blind weighs about 100 lbs. and two people can easily lift it into the back of my pick-up, which is how I haul it around."

During the off-season, he stores his blinds in a Quonset to protect then from weathering.

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Hunting blind has a door at one end and drop-down windows on both sides. The exterior is made of straw and coconut husks sewn in between 2 layers of netting.

Barabash built blind's frame by bending metal hog panels and welding them to a rectangular angle iron base.

His Traps Stop Carpenter Bees

Jack Yeary traps carpenter bees around his place before they can drill holes in exposed wood on his house, fences or outdoor furniture. His traps work so well that he has started selling them.

"I've sold more than 25 of them to people in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana and Michigan," says Yeary. "They are easy to use and work well."

Yeary's traps look a bit like a birdhouse with a Mason jar hanging from the bottom. Bees enter through one of 3 small holes near the top. It is dark in the house, but they see daylight below in the jar and go to it. Once in the jar, they are unable to find their way back out.

"The secret is getting the angle of the hole just right," says Yeary.

Apparently his is just right. One customer bought 2 traps, and before she could hang them up, the traps had 6 carpenter bees trapped inside.

"I use screws, no nails and a tapered design, similar to a birdhouse with a 4 to 5-in. sq. bottom," says Yeary. "They are about 12 to14 in. tall without the jar."

Yeary sells his traps locally, but he is willing to ship them. They sell for $25 plus S & H.

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Bees enter through small holes near top of trap and go into jar below, where they can't find their way back out.