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Fish Waste Utilization Project Interim Report

May 1, 2003

We are pleased to have had the opportunity to conduct this SARE sponsored on-farm research. Though one of the goals was to cooperatively utilize the fish waste, other farmers who initially agreed to take material, didn't want the fish waste when it became available. It was our farm, Goranson Farm that undertook the execution of this project.

The 2002 growing season was challenging for growing as well as our SARE Project. The spring weather was wet and cold and delayed the incorporation of fall planted cover crops. By the time the fields that were set aside for the application of fish waste had dried enough to support the weight of a tractor, the vetch-rye had grown to over six feet tall. After flail chopping, we found the 6 to 10 inches of organic matter impossible to plow down even with our 130 HP tractor and our newly rebuilt plows. As a result, the piles sat for a time before we were able to spread them. At the same time we were taking in fish to make sure we got the 50 yards allowable under the direct application provision of the Maine DEP regulations. We mixed the fish in a ratio suitable for spreading with a manure spreader.

When the fields were ready and all the fish and sawdust piles had been combined, the smell that emanated was noticeable to say the least. A couple of our neighbors made phone calls and brought down a parade of Extension, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Environmental Protection personnel to check it out. Fortunately, they were all on board and had signed on to the grant proposal.

This winter Tim Griffin, ARS researcher, with the help of Mark Hutchinson, our Ag Extension agent, did nitrate mineralization studies on some of the mixtures we had made. The results were surprising and will be invaluable in forming plans for utilizing this material this season.

We are approximately 50 percent of our way through the DEP permitting process for a composting facility. Our site and soils are approved. The facility plan has been drawn up by the NRCS engineer. We hope to break ground in May.

In summary, we learned a lot, had to smooth a few ruffled feathers and got some interesting data back on our test plots and field applications. We spread fish waste in this direct application method on 20 acres. We are pleased with the results of last years work and are convinced that fish waste will be the key to providing our customers with the most highly mineralized, best tasting, vegetables possible.

Sincerely,

Robert Johanson

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