

FARMING

Dairymen in Canaan Teaming Up To Handle—or Harvest—Manure

Continued from Page Twenty-One farmers here say, they would never be able to afford the improvements to their operations.

Mr. Freund, of Freund Farm Inc., has plans to improve his manure storage program. He took a few moments, while driving to the post office, to explain the problem of handling manure. "The most efficient thing to do with manure is to put it back on the ground," he begins. The problem is that during the winter months, that manure will not break down on the frozen and snow-covered fields, which means it can run off and create environmental problems. Also, manure spread at the wrong time will not have the nutritive effect on corn of manure spread at the right time in the growing cycle.

And so as farming has become more scientific and cost-effective, farmers have started to store manure over the winter, to be put into the ground in the spring. But storage creates a "time

crunch" in April for the farmer, who has to spread all of the manure accumulated over the winter in the same two weeks that he plants corn. For that reason, the handling of manure has to be as simple and efficient as possible. Separating manure into easily handled solids and liquids, and improved pumping systems for the liquid manure, will cut down on the time and expense of trucking it around to the fields, and make the operation more efficient, he predicts.

There are also, he notes, occasional problems with critics who object to the smell of manure or traces of it on the road. That is not a problem in Canaan, both Mr. Freund and Mr. Jacquier say. Canaan is a working town that is used to having farm trucks on the roads. But many of these farmers use fields in neighboring towns such as Sharon and Salisbury where farms are becoming more scarce. Improved manure storage and

handling should improve that situation as well, Mr. Freund notes.

"There is a real loss of a sense of reality, and it is too bad," he remarks of the difficulties some farmers face with their neighbors. "People don't know where their food comes from. Well it comes from the soil and it smells," he laughs. The manure put back in the soil is what continues to enrich it. "The soil is decomposing, and it's alive," he says.

Kathleen Johnson, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, oversaw construction of the manure storage tank on Elm Knoll farm. The manure cooperative, she says, is one of only two that she is aware of in the country. The other is in Washington State.

"The concept of manure management has been a concern for quite a while, and environmental regulations have focused more and more on those issues. There was a law passed in Vermont last year, and it had to do with restricted winter spreading of manure, and so that is where the regulations are going," she explains. "People don't want to spread manure on frozen ground where it might flow directly into the water."

The Blackberry River, which runs directly behind the farms on Route 44, is of particular concern, she noted. "Any water studies that have been done have always shown the water quality to be extremely good, but they feel responsible for maintaining that water quality, they want to make sure that it stays that way," she says of local farmers.

The other farms in the cooperative are Carlwood farm, Sunset Hill farm, Dennis H. Jasmine's farm, and Pine Meadow farm. The group is also looking into the possibility of selling methane, another byproduct of manure storage. The group has 1,300 mature cows, which produce about 117,000 pounds of manure a day. Member farms also have 2,000 acres of corn and 1,250 acres in hay. The group hopes to have two new manure pits and two new separators within the year.

