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Residents raising a stink over hog waste sludge

Sun, 06/23/2013 - 7:00am | [Dave Hinton](#) [1]

Hog waste sludge being applied to farm fields west of Rantoul from the Rantoul Foods pork plant is causing concerns.

RURAL RANTOUL — Toni Olinger said the odor is enough to make her sick.

Fellow country dweller Julie Hardy said the smell cost her business thousands of dollars last fall.

Rantoul Mayor Chuck Smith is concerned that the stench will hurt business development on the village's west side.

The big stink is caused by hog waste sludge being applied to farm fields west of Rantoul from the Rantoul Foods pork plant.

Applying the sludge is farmer John Clifford, who is hauling away the pork plant material, spreading it and stockpiling it on fields along County Road 2900 N.

Clifford did not return phone calls asking for comment.

Julie Hardy, co-owner with husband Mark of Hardy's Reindeer Ranch, 1356 County Road 2900 N, said Clifford's applying sludge on a field across the road from the ranch last year cost them \$20,000 in business.

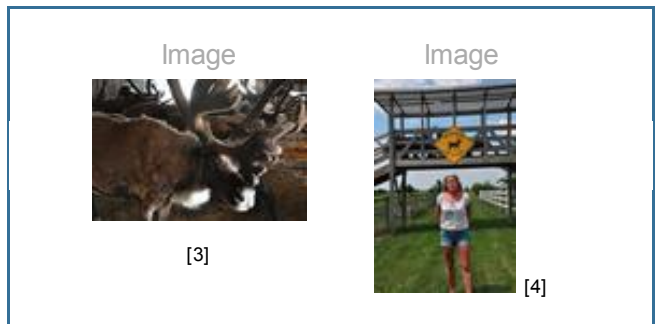
"Our problem was intense last fall," Hardy said. "What's really concerning is that he's not incorporating, not discing it in."



[2]

Photo by: Dave Hinton/Rantoul Press

Mark Hardy points to a fly strip covered in flies in a barn where some of his reindeer are kept. He said he has to change the long fly strip daily now compared to about every four days in the past before hog waste sludge was being deposited in nearby fields.



Image

Image

[3]

[4]

Instead, she said, Clifford was broadcasting the sludge atop the ground.

She said many customers were holding their nose complaining of the odor. Many mistakenly thought the fault was that of the reindeer ranch.

This year, Clifford has been stockpiling large amounts of the sludge in a wheat field south of the homes of Corrine Hemrich, 1250 County Road 2900 N, and Julie Hemrich and Toni Olinger. Corrine Hemrich, who has lived at her home since 1970, said she has a bad lung, and the odor is affecting her quality of life.

"I've been through a lot in my life," Hemrich said. "I'd hate to think that something like this smell would mess up my lung and put me in the hospital."

The odor isn't the only issue. Some rural residents worry about the health aspect.

"The flies carry disease," Olinger said. "It's an environmental hazard, a health hazard. Does it have blood-borne pathogens? Does it have antibiotics from the pork they've butchered? Does it have feces in it? Does it have urine in it? The flies that are biting us, do they carry diseases?"

Olinger said no one can tell them what is being dumped in the fields.

"It's going into the field tiles," she said.

Stacy James, a water resources scientist with the Champaign-based Prairie Rivers Network, a nonprofit statewide river conservation organization, said her group is concerned about what is being dumped on the fields.

James said Rantoul Foods has "a water pollution control permit from the Illinois EPA, and it does allow for offsite interim storage of dried sludge ... for two months."

"The permit says, 'Measures shall be taken to contain runoff and leachate from any dried sludge that is stored,'" James said.

Andrew Mason, Illinois EPA spokesman, said the agency is monitoring the situation.

Mason said the pork plant sludge "has been treated. All the water goes through a treatment plant. All the sludge has been dewatered.

"This is livestock waste," Mason said. "This kind of thing is common (in the country). We've been out there several times and are monitoring it. We're determining what the next course of action is, if there is any."

Julie Pryde, director of Champaign-Urbana Public Health, said her department has been approached about the issue.

"This is an EPA issue right now," she said. "Hog poop is an issue with EPA. If it's human waste, it would be Public Health."

She said any time fecal matter is involved, whether airborne or not, there is potential for disease.

"It certainly has the potential for having public health problems," Pryde said. "It just doesn't appear that it has yet."

Pryde said if anyone becomes ill from what they believe could be caused by the sludge, they should first go to a physician and then report it to the health department.

James Jendruczek, president of Rantoul Foods, said Clifford has indicated to him that he has been putting lime on the sludge to reduce the odor.

"He told me it was good" at reducing the smell, Jendruczek said. "The EPA came out, and everything John's done has been correct. He has all his permits. Everything he's done is correct.

"He's assured us that everything is correct. We talked to the EPA that everything he said is right, and they verified."

Rantoul Foods slaughters an average of 3,800 hogs per day and employs 340 people.

The issue isn't just a rural one.

Smith, Rantoul's mayor, said he and Village Administrator Bruce Sandahl met with Jendruczek recently to discuss the situation.

"We made him aware of the problem," Smith said. "He said he felt there was something that they could do and would look into it as soon as he got back into the plant.

"He said he wants to be a good neighbor. He wants to help."

But at a later meeting, Jendruczek informed them that not much could be done.

"I'm not saying it's the pork plant's problem," Smith said. "The neighbors have been complaining and asking the village to intercede."

The pork plant is within village limits, but the village has no control over Clifford's sludge disposal practices.

Rantoul's west side is under development with announced plans for a new motel, senior-living units and perhaps other new business near Wal-Mart. Smith is concerned the odor might give potential developers second thoughts.

"It's a grave concern to us about what's happening," Smith said.

#1 ^[6]

Danno ^[7] wrote 1 day 6 hours ago

Gee, I recollect, some years ago, that this Plant would provide jobs and, tax benefits to the community; off set, perhaps, by our IL Govm't tax breaks to certain 'entities deserving of said breaks' to be decided by 'us'. Now, the EPA is biting at what 'they' created? No one along the road to license approval pondered such an outcome? Heck, if they need to borrow an Ouija Board, I could loan one, for a 'nominal' fee.

#2 ^[8]**mark taylor's ghost** ^[9] wrote 1 day 3 hours ago

But we all know that toxic sludge is good for us.

#3 ^[10]**Danvillain** ^[11] wrote 1 day 2 hours ago

Heck, the town of Hoopeston has been dealing with town-wide stench for many MANY years. Where's our EPA "air freshener???" Money can sometimes stink! Too bad most of the pig plant wages are being sent south of the border...

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