

# Mercer Vu Goes Brown

With the world's ever-growing list of environmental problems and concerns, just about everyone is looking for ways to go "Green" and become part of the solution. In the world of farming, the need to protect the environment is a big one. With increasing government and voter pressure on all aspects of farming to comply with current environmental regulations, it is encouraging to know that there are more and more positive outcomes that result from better management of solid waste from dairy operations.

While we continue to advocate that Farmers, and Dairyman in particular, were our nation's first environmentalists and recyclers; it is likewise encouraging to find them adapting to new innovations that make it easier and more cost effective than ever for Dairyman to build and maintain a closed loop operation. Such

is the case with Mercer Vu Farms. Their willingness to embrace new composting technology and to incorporate the right equipment for the job has begun to pay off in huge dividends. In their search to find tools to make their composting site run efficiently Mercer Vu came across advertisements and websites that mentioned Brown Bear Corporation's composting tools. When they began researching Brown Bear Corporation's composting aerators they had no idea they had just put themselves on track to have their composting burdens significantly lightened.

Mercer Vu Farms is a large dairy located in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. They are currently milking 1400 cows with a total cow population of 1650 head. With that many cows, one can easily imagine the amount of solid waste the dairy has to process. Before Mercer

Vu purchased the Brown Bear PA35 Compost Aerator they had piles of solid waste stacked up and sitting all over their sizeable facility.

As they began developing their composting site, Mercer VU was very conscientious about ways in which they could comply with the rules and regulations that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had put in place. Compliance with these regulations is required by law, yes; but in the end, it is in the best interest of dairymen and all of farmers to do so.

Composting can be a huge time and money saving endeavor for farmers. Recycling and processing the solid waste produced on site allows dairymen to meet many of their own needs without having to purchase bedding



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material and other byproducts from someone else. In addition to the liberating self-sufficiency provided by a successful composting operation, dairymen are also able to convert some of the dairy manure solids they have in abundance in their facilities into compost fertilizer that can be marketed to the general public with landscaping or gardening needs, or to commercial landscape operators, who then resell to their residential and commercial accounts.

After the initial phone conversations Mercer Vu made to learn more about Brown Bear's products, Phil Brown, who handles sales and marketing in Mercer Vu Farm's part of the country, began visiting their farm to see what their needs were and to offer consultation on how to construct and operate a composting facility that would best meet those needs.

As mentioned earlier, prior to Mercer Vu's purchase of the Brown Bear PA35 they literally had piles of manure and other solid waste stacked up and sitting waiting for a much needed solution. By incorporating Brown Bear's PA35, the method and effectiveness of the composting operation was dramatically impacted.

In addition to the significant improvement in the day to day handling of waste, Mercer Vu has also enjoyed a reduction in the overall moisture content of these solids. Originally they were just too wet to do anything with. After using the PA35 to quickly and efficiently

create windrows drying conditions were dramatically improved.

"Using the right equipment has allowed us to easily handle the volume of manure created from our facility, and has made a big difference in the amount of compost we can make," said Rick Hissong, who is part of the third generation in his family to run the farm. "The equipment helps us to introduce more oxygen into these materials and has created much better drying conditions thereby reducing total moisture in our manure. Originally our moisture content hovered around 83 to 84 percent, we were immediately able to reduce to the 65-70 percent range."

In addition to being able to handle larger volumes of material and make a significant impact on the moisture levels in their waste stream, Mercer Vu's composting process helps to convert the nitrogen inherent to manure solids to a more stable form, priming it for use elsewhere on the farm.

Initially, the nitrogen found in these solids is not available for reuse because it is unstable and due to its high solubility in water can cause leeching problems. "Our new composting operation has changed all that," Rick says. "We really like the way the PA35 helps make the nitrogen "so stable that it doesn't have a leeching problem for us."

Stan Brown, of Brown Bear Corporation, explained: "nitrogen and phosphorous are good for crops; but

the Department of Environmental Protection, (DEP), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and county health departments, depending on who regulates these matters in what states, also see them as problem nutrients. These problem nutrients are in the manure that comes out of the animal and they are not very stable, they're pretty volatile at that point." Once these nutrients are stabilized, which is simply a byproduct of a good composting process, the end product can be used on the corn crop which has high demands for nitrogen and phosphorous.

Rick Hissong said, "anything we can do to get the nutrients into the soil and available to the crops while protecting the land and water is very important to us; not only because we feel we have a special responsibility to protect the environment, but also because we feel it shows responsibility. It's the right thing to do. We know we are managing the waste products from the dairy to the best of our ability; and those who regulate these things understand our commitment and appreciate what we are doing. By making proper use of the PA35, and incorporating what we have learned about composting from Brown Bear Inc., we have been provided with a great management tool."

Hissong said that another factor that drew Mercer Vu toward Brown Bear's composting philosophy and their PA35 was the fact that the PA35 comes in multiple configurations so that it can be bolted on to existing farm equipment. "We were up and running in no time because we were able to use power equipment we already have on the farm, which made it relatively inexpensive to start composting."

In addition to quick implementation and ease of use, Mercer Vu has enjoyed using their PA35 because of the great customer service Brown Bear offers. "Even after the warranty period was over they stood behind their product, and updated it according to a factory generated service bulletin." What more can a dairyman ask for?

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