IMMAG - Iowa Manure Management Action Group

Hiring a Commercial Manure Applicator
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Manure application is a big business in Iowa. On average, Iowa has about 500 commercial manure services that employ around 2,200 people. In addition, 25 businesses located outside of Iowa are certified to apply manure in Iowa. Commercial manure services and custom haulers or applicators are a very important component to agriculture in Iowa, providing services that allow livestock producers to focus on livestock concerns and crop producers to focus on production practices. Many commercial manure services or businesses are leaders in equipment innovation, application techniques and offer a high degree of service to their clients. The industry has matured in Iowa with the requirement for state certification. Commercial manure businesses invest hundreds of dollars in getting employees trained to meet state requirements, but many also offer training above and beyond the three hours of annual training required by the state. Many businesses now provide year-round employment opportunities as they have diversified and that has increased the rate of retention for experienced and qualified employees.

While many livestock farmers have already contracted services to have manure applied this fall, here are some things you should consider when hiring a commercial applicator.

**Hire a Certified Commercial Manure Service.** Iowa law requires that all commercial manure applicators meet certification requirements to handle, transport, store or land-apply manure. This applies to all businesses regardless of the type of manure (solid or liquid), amount of manure hauled or source or manure (animal species). Any commercial manure business located outside of Iowa is also required to be certified in Iowa if they do business in Iowa. Ask the business to provide documentation of their certification and make sure all employees have met certification requirements. A list of currently certified commercial manure services is available on the IMMAG web page at: [http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/info/cca.xls](http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/info/cca.xls)

**Inquire about additional training or membership in applicators’ associations:** While Iowa law requires commercial manure applicators to attend 3 hours of training annually or to take and pass a certification exam annually, some businesses require additional in-house training. This training may include developing manure spill response techniques, tractor or equipment handling and safety training. Ask the business if they attend or offer training in addition to the state certification requirements. Also inquire if the business or owner is a member of any associations for manure or nutrient applicators. Membership in these associations can foster communication, ideas and respond to legislation.
Ask to see a copy of an emergency or spill response plan: Spill response is highly dependent on each situation, however there are some basic steps that can be employed in advance of manure pumping and land-application as well as during a spill event. Ask the commercial manure application business to share a copy of their emergency or spill response plan with you. If they do not have a plan then you should carefully consider the risk in hiring that business. Likewise, as a livestock owner, you need to share you emergency/spill response plan with the commercial applicator. Walk them through separation distances for land application and show them where tile inlets and other sensitive areas are located. Provide a list of emergency phone numbers you would use in the event of a spill, power failure or other emergency. Share a list of available neighbors with extra pumps or dirt moving equipment. It is recommended to have a copy of the commercial applicator’s current insurance policy. This would be used to ensure they have proper coverage should an accident occur involving their equipment, their employees and/or another vehicle or property damage. It is important to discuss and supply bio-security and ventilation protocols for pumping to ensure employee protection, animal health and protection of property. Having ventilation protocols in place prior to pumping will keep everyone involved educated and alerted to the potential risks involved while pumping.

MOST IMPORTANT: Make sure no employees of the facility or the commercial pumping business ever enter a building that is being agitated or pumped, and maintain increased ventilation for minimum of one hour after all activity has ceased in that barn prior to allowing anyone to enter.

Availability and land-application timing: Fall is the primary manure application season in Iowa. Our past several falls have been extremely short in terms of land-application. We have had wet springs, very wet falls and early freezes. There has also been an increase in the amount of corn to corn rotations which generally leads to a later harvest than a bean to corn rotation. We now have laws in place that regulate timing and placement of liquid manure application from confinement facilities during winter months. All of these factors have combined to shorten the window of application, putting more pressure to start as soon as harvest begins, taking every opportunity to apply when soil conditions are optimum. Understanding that managing nitrogen and other nutrients is a priority, you also need to consider the availability of a commercial applicator and work with that commercial applicator to find a balance of timing and nutrient management. If manure serves as your primary nutrient source for crop production, application later in the fall may help to conserve nitrogen. You may need to consider negotiating with your commercial applicator to make sure their application schedule meets your crop production and storage needs realizing that application later in the fall is also subject to weather issues and potentially less flexibility of a commercial applicator’s schedule. If optimum soil conditions exist to apply in early fall, discuss the availability of a nitrogen stabilizer that could be added during application that may help conserve nitrogen for crop uptake.
Method of Application: The method of manure application can affect nitrogen loss from volatilization, can reduce residue amounts and can increase erosion potential. Consider hiring a commercial applicator that has application equipment that can meet your needs or requirements for residue management and erosion control. Other things to consider prior to application are agitation and pumping. Depending on your storage environment, you will want to discuss agitation and how much is needed, accounting for solids and ventilation risk.

A professional commercial application business is a valuable resource and generally can provide a wealth of knowledge in all aspects of commercial manure application. Once you’ve hired a commercial applicator there should be a relationship that develops which provides a good line of communication to plan the timing of application, provides accurate nutrient placement, and an increased level of trust that bio-security and ventilation protocols are followed to help reduce potential risk to health and property.

Angela Rieck-Hinz is an extension program specialist for Iowa State University Extension and is the coordinator of the Iowa Manure Management Action Group (IMMAG). You can read more about manure management issues by visiting the IMMAG Web Page at http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/

Tony Sents is the current president of the Iowa Commercial Nutrient Applicators Association. Learn more about Iowa Commercial Nutrient Applicators Association by calling 800-383-1682 or visiting http://iowacnaa.org/