

Testimony of the Maryland Horse Council

Re: House Bill 171, Department of the Environment - Yard Waste and Food Residuals Diversion and Infrastructure - Study

House Committee on Environment and Transportation

February 8, 2017



The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based, umbrella trade association of the entire horse industry in Maryland. Our membership includes horse farms, horse related businesses, individual enthusiasts, and breed, interest and discipline associations. As such, we represent over 30,000 Marylanders who make their living with horses, or just own and love them.

In 2011, MHC established a Farm Stewardship Committee to assist horse farm owners and managers to reach their land stewardship goals by providing user-friendly information, community support, and access to information on financing and other incentives. The Committee also works to gain recognition for Maryland's horse farms as excellent stewards of about one-quarter (approx. 587,000 acres) of all agricultural land in the state. Much of that equine-dedicated land is in pasture and forest, both of which help reduce run-off to streams and rivers and provide wildlife habitat. We are dedicated to bringing the voice of the horse community into discussions of laws, regulations and incentive programs for agriculture and for the environment.

MHC has been actively pursuing ways to increase the available facilities and opportunities for composting horse manure. For the past several years MHC has been conducting a careful study of options. After a state-wide survey on the use of the approximately 55 pounds of manure each of our horses produce every day, MHC is dedicated to promoting modern composting and its use for on-farm and commercial organic soil enhancement. An important partner in these efforts has been the Soil Conservation Districts Equine Specialists. We have also been in contact with organizations promoting food composting and believe there is ample opportunity for cooperation and coordination with this community. We have noted, in particular, that the absence of a broad, wholistic, and regional approach, and the

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lack of regional infra-structure, have been significant hindrances to the development of effective and efficient solutions for the re-use of important organic resources.

Composted horse manure is a valuable and as yet under-utilized resource. According to a 2010 equine census,* Maryland is home to 79,100 equine animals housed at 16,000 locations with 188,000 acres devoted strictly to horses. Many members of Maryland's equestrian community are already leaders in quality composting and pasture management.



As noted above, the average horse excretes 55 pounds of waste per day,** Therefore, using the 2010 census numbers, Maryland horses produce approximately 1.5 billion pounds (approximately 800,000 tons) of manure per year. While many farms are able to compost this material and use it as fertilizer and soil amendment on-farm, many others do not have that capacity and are forced to have that material disposed of off-farm, often at great expense to the farmers. And some of this material may end up in landfills. (A 2015 MHC survey of Maryland horse farmers revealed that 34% of respondents reported that they sent un-composted manure off the farm for disposal. 50% of respondents who had their horse manure hauled away were not aware of the ultimate disposition.)

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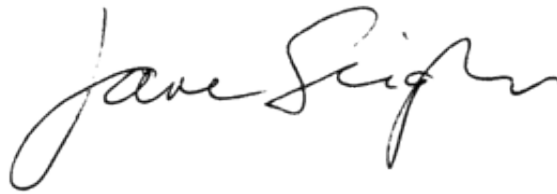
Horse manure is a good substrate to use for compost. First, it's drier than other livestock manure, therefore it's easier to transport from one location to another. Second, it has a 5:1:2 ratio of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium,** and thus is relatively balanced in nutrients when it's applied as a soil amendment. Third, when the compostable manure includes animal bedding products such as sawdust or wood shavings, or other vegetative materials such as food waste, it is close to an ideal 25:1 carbon to nitrogen ratio. It is in the best interest not only of horse farm owners, but of all Maryland citizens and of our environment to ensure that these waste animal and plant products are recycled to their highest and best use.

MHC believes that SB 99 will be an important step in finding and developing composting opportunities, and increasing the number of composting facilities, which, in turn, potentially will increase the opportunities for composting horse manure. In those facilities where it is practiced, it has been shown that food waste when composted with horse manure results in an excellent compost/soil

amendment. Given the large quantity of un-composted Maryland manure and food waste currently being disposed of, exploring ways in which food waste and horse manure can be composted, either jointly or in related facilities, is an indisputable win-win for the State from both an economic and environmental standpoint.

Therefore, MHC supports HB 171 and urges a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,



President



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* http://mda.maryland.gov/horseboard/pdf/2010_equine_census.pdf.

** [Lawrence, L., J.R. Bicudo, and E. Wheeler. 2003. Horse manure characteristics literature and database review. In Proc. International Anim., Ag. Food Processing Wastes Symp., Research Triangle Park, NC, Oct. 12-15., 277-284. St. Joseph, MI: Am. Soc. Ag. and Biol. Engineers.](#)