

# *Carcass Disposal*

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A plan for euthanasia of sick or suffering animals and disposal of carcasses is a necessary component of managing any animal livestock unit. In the November 2000 issue of Colorado Dairy News Dr Frank Garry reviewed practical means of euthanizing cattle and calves. This information may be found at [www.cvmb.colostate.edu/ilm](http://www.cvmb.colostate.edu/ilm).

Disposal of carcasses has recently become a challenge on farms because of the gradual disappearance of commercial rendering companies. Costs to pick up and render a dead animal have changed. Prior to 1985, many commercial rendering companies would pay to pick up a dead animal. Today charges vary from \$15 to \$100 per animal. The change in economics reflects the demand for carcass by-products and the cost of animal disposal. If commercial rendering services are available in your area, it is important to **completely** cover a carcass. This is not only law but will prevent embarrassing incidents with the general public.

The cause of death will determine the method of disposal. Animals with infectious diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease or anthrax are disposed of in a different manner than animals that die of pneumonia or toxic mastitis. Death of animals exposed to a toxic substance such as PCP's need to be handled to prevent toxic ingestion by free roaming predators. When large numbers of animals are involved, the State Department of Agriculture, the Office of the State Veterinarian, and, in some instances, the Offices of Public Health or Environmental Protection Agency must be consulted.

On-farm disposal of carcasses is a viable alternative to use of commercial rendering pick-up but must be achieved without causing environmental contamination or health risk to workers, and preventing consumption toxicity by predators when euthanasia solutions are used. Composting barns are similar to commodity sheds in size and height but not as deep. A composting barn does not have complete walls on three sides, in order to allow sufficient air flow to dry the composting sawdust. Composting will occur by the natural bacteria of the animal's intestinal tract. Decay of the soft tissue may take as long as two months after which time, the sawdust and non-composted material is generally moved to a new bay to allow air to circulate and complete composting of bone. At the end of a full four-month composting period, some bone material will need to be ground into smaller pieces or disposed of in another acceptable method.

Use of on-farm composting barns necessitates a commitment of capital for initial investment in a facility and labor to operate and monitor the process. During the process decomposing tissue in the sawdust bedding of the composting barn will give off odors and acids that are not pleasant to smell. Finally, the composted sawdust and tissue will have to be disposed. In most instances, it is returned to crop fields.