

jumped from receiving three or four partner project applications in the Willow Creek Watershed to a whopping 19 partner project applications in the *Growing Forward* conservation auction trial.”

The four conservation districts that have completed or are completing a conservation auction are Turtle Mountain, Assiniboine Hills, Seine-Rat River and East Interlake.



Compost turning machine

Bringing partners together

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (MAFRD) policy analyst Tony Szumigalski says each conservation auction can trigger “an endless variety of projects of all sizes” and often involves major partnerships with agencies such as Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, Nature Conservancy of Canada and Ducks Unlimited. The Lake Winnipeg Basin Stewardship Fund is also contributing to the conservation auction initiative.

MAFRD tested the conservation auction concept in a series of workshops and auction simulations in 2010 with funding from *Growing Forward* that brought together more than 100 participants, including producers, government employees, members of non-government organizations, students and professors.

Based on their success, a conservation auction pilot project was launched by the EICD for the Willow Creek sub-watershed area in 2012. The auction’s goal was to improve drinking water quality, surface water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, and soil and shoreline maintenance. Many of these projects have since gone on to a second phase under *Growing Forward 2*.

“Everybody wins,” says Szumigalski. “The landowner asks the price they think is fair, and until their bid is actually selected, they’re under no obligation. The conservation districts and agencies are able to cost-effectively improve our watersheds. MAFRD—along with our partners in Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship—sets it all in motion and is there to help every step of the way.” ■

Manure management good for farms and the environment



Brandt’s manure spreader is mounted on a GPS-equipped truck that evenly spreads the manure in a 40-foot swath



Brandt’s 12,000 square-foot concrete pad for storing and composting chicken manure

Improving the way we manage manure in Manitoba, directly affects the health of our water and land. More farmers are committing to storing manure in ways that benefit both their bottom line as well as the environment.

Bernie Brandt, owner of Tiny Creek Farms near Steinbach, Manitoba is one of those farmers. With funds from *Growing Forward*, Bernie Brandt built a 12,000 square-foot concrete pad for storing and composting chicken manure.

“We’re already seeing a return on our investment in several ways,” he says.

“We have always seen manure as an asset, not as a liability,” says Brandt.

Built half a mile from his chicken barns, Brandt’s pad has eliminated winter manure spreading and the need to stockpile chicken manure in his fields. It has kept nutrients from over-saturating the soil and leaching into waterways. Easily accessible via new all-weather roads, the pad has significantly improved the efficiency of his farming operations and freed up valuable acres for farming.

Change for the better

“We have always seen manure as an asset, not as a liability,” says Brandt. “We soil test our fields every year to help us decide, together with an agronomist, which fields can best use the nutrients in the manure. The manure composts well due to the straw content. Composted manure is a more concentrated nutrient that can be more readily used by the crops. It has 70 per cent of the volume and is therefore more efficient to haul over long distances.”

The composted manure also provides longer-term value because of the soil’s increased water-holding capacity and extended nutrient release.

“It’s improved our soil quality and helped us reduce our inputs while maximizing our yields,” says Brandt.

“As scientists recommend new ideas and practices, I believe that committing to these ideas can only lead to change for the better.”

Brandt also uses an innovative manure spreader. Similar to a conventional spreader, his is mounted on a GPS-equipped truck that evenly spreads the manure in a 40-foot swath.

Funding available for manure management

Brandt says he hopes more and more producers will discover what beneficial management practices relating to manure have to offer.

“As scientists recommend new ideas and practices, I believe that committing to these ideas can only lead to change for the better,” he says.

Farmers who are interested in improving the way they manage manure should investigate the funding available through *Growing Forward 2*’s Growing Assurance – Environment program. The goal of the program is to make farming operations more environmentally sustainable, productive and profitable. One way it does this is by funding Beneficial Management Practices.

Clay Sawka, a nutrient management specialist at MAFRD, explains: “The increased manure storage capacity Beneficial Management Practices have helped eliminate winter spreading from many operations by supporting the construction of structures to store manure. This has reduced the potential for phosphorus running off the land into our water and contributing to the algal blooms in our lakes during spring snowmelt.”

The program has already funded 16 new manure storage structures and nine repairs since the initiative began in April 2013.

Bottom-line benefits

MAFRD also offers a Manure Management Financial Assistance Program to help small pig operations build additional manure storage capacity, and help all size pig farms repair manure storage structures, and install manure treatment systems to meet the soil test phosphorus thresholds. ■