

News Column for Use Week of 07/01/2019  
Brett Melton, Extension Agent: Livestock Production  
River Valley Extension District  
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### **Alternatives for Disposing of Dead Animals**

In the past, producers and veterinarians have had the pleasure of calling animal salvage companies to take dead livestock away to rendering facilities for processing. However, there are no longer pick-up businesses operating. Since rendering is out of the question for the area, incineration, burial, and composting are the other options. I will also say, incineration is difficult for large carcasses, and it is also expensive. For arguments sake, we will take incineration off the table. Burial, generally, would require a backhoe of some sort which a farm potentially would not have.

The last option for disposal of dead livestock is composting. Composting can be done with equipment and supplies that are already on most farms. The only equipment needed for composting is a tractor with a front-end loader. Other materials needed are an absorbent material (old hay, straw, corn stalks, sawdust, or wood shavings) and a bulking material (spoiled silage/feed or scraped manure). To begin, place 24 inches of an absorbent material down to place the carcass(es) on. It is recommended to cut the animal open to speed up the process. If you are composting a ruminant, you must at least puncture the rumen to allow gas to escape. Next, place 24-36 inches of moist bulking material on top of the carcass and base layer. The correct moisture of this material will feel like a wet sponge. This envelope layer should cover the entire animal. If the animal is not completely covered, then odor can escape and will allow access for coyotes and other scavengers. The last step is to cap the pile with another 12-24 inches of dry carbon material – like the base layer.

For effective composting excess water should be diverted from the pile. Make a small trench to allow water to run away from the pile if necessary. After 90 days of composting the pile will need to be turned or mixed. Depending on the size of the carcass(es), another 90 days may be required. It is not recommended that piles are turned in the winter. After composting, there may be some large bones in the piles. These large bones can be buried or disposed of in the normal trash. Fully composted piles should be applied to the field according to nutrient management plans.

As a reference, single 1,000-pound animals will require about four bales to construct the base layer and cap. If you do not have enough carbon material, there is no point in attempting to compost. The carcass(es) must be completely covered for successful composting.

One way of disposing of animals is to do nothing and letting Mother Nature take care of the carcass(es). However, this method is not preferred and is illegal in the state of Kansas (KSA 47-1219). All livestock operations experience death loss, and a plan needs to be in place to deal with these losses. For more information call Brett Melton in the Concordia River Valley Extension Office by calling 785-243-8185 or emailing [bmelton@ksu.edu](mailto:bmelton@ksu.edu).