3

Economic, Scientific, and Infrastructure Basis for Using Municipal Composts in Agriculture

Gary W. Hyatt

Procter & Gamble Pharmaceuticals
Cincinnati, Ohio

Agricultural, social, economic and political science bear on the development of solid waste compost usage for crop production in the USA. Following the introduction, this chapter begins immediately by answering a fundamental question: What is the economic benefit to the farmer of using compost as a production input? The financial models project that the value of residual N from composts applied over a series of years in a structured management program can be cost competitive with conventional N fertilizer. Suggestions for optimizing compost N value for even more favorable economics are demonstrated.

Following the financial analysis are summaries of basic and applied research projects that are currently sponsored by the Composting Council, a round-table association broadly representing the commercial and municipal stakeholders and participants in the composting industry. These studies are still underway, but as the majority approach completion, important findings on the safe use of composts in agriculture are forthcoming. When brought together in one place, it is easy to see there is a large body of supporting information challenging us to make broader use in agriculture of the organic materials we routinely discard (e.g., see TVA, 1975; Composting Council, 1992; and below).

THERE IS NO LACK OF INFORMATION ON COMPOSTING

This is at once encouraging and frustrating. Encouraging because we have volumes of data on which to base positive decisions for compost use in a wide variety of agricultural, horticultural and land reclamation applications; frustrating because decision makers are not receiving the information, or when they receive it, action is not taken. It seems society quickly forgets