

Workshop on Knowledge and Practices of Using Treated Sewage Sludge on Land
Cambridge 15-16.04.2008

ReVAQ, how a stakeholder management board and QA could re-enable land application

First of all I have to apologize for not having any slides to present. Instead You are able to enjoy the amazing Stonehenge.

I also have to say that I am not mainly an expert in the technical details. I am an environmental expert principally taking the retailer perspective.

As Simon Black said earlier, quality assurance is about to build confidence.

Background

Since more than 20 years, the issue of using sludge in agriculture, has been an issue for one of the main consumer organisations and thus for the Swedish Farmers Association (LRF).

As the consumer organisation has focused on the content of chemicals in the sludge and highlighting the cadmium content in food and the risks linked to this, the farmers started a boycott of sludge in the end of 1980.

Trying to solve this "problem" and under the threat of that the sewage treatment plant owners (only public ones in Sweden) had to build incinerators, an agreement between the Environmental Protection Agency and LRF was established early 1990.

However this was an agreement without teeth as the food industry still was hesitating as they, in no case, would jeopardise their brand name in the eyes of the consumers.

In some communities in Sweden those so called Sludge Consultation fora, a prerequisite in the agreement, has been working fairly well.

In the end of 1990 the Swedish parliament adopted national environmental targets. One of these mean that especially the phosphorus should be recycled in the food production.

In order to develop a more proactive approach the Swedish Water Association (SWA) and many other persons active in the issue, decided, early 2000, to start a project, ReVAQ. This should try to investigate whether a systematic quality management within the water treatment plants, together with a systematic upstream work, made it possible to improve the quality of the sludge in such a way that it was able to get a similar quality of the sludge as the toilet water.

The report of the project concludes that this is possible.

To enable a national approach and a more stringent development the SWA 2006 initiated a work to develop a quality assurance scheme. The water treatment plants should then enter this certification scheme and their work should be verified through a third party inspection.

The scheme is nothing less than the ISO 9000 and/or 14000 which has been fully accepted and adopted by many other sectors of the society.

Sweden would focus on Category 1 as the German scheme has defined, as we heard before.

In Sweden the focus has been on the sludge itself and not how it performs in the soil. Thus chemicals intrinsic properties have been emphasized and their anaerobic properties, has been as important as their aerobic ones. The opening that this certification issue enables, is that there will be some indicators used which probably will focus on the soils and if the volume of

the unwanted substances will increase over a long period of time. The toxic aspects will not be forgotten, so the content of some “old” substances, as cadmium, will probably still be an important indicator.

To achieve the actors blessing, we intend to invite the mainplayers to be owner of the certification scheme. Beside the watercompanies, the farmers (LRF), the food industry and the Swedish food retail federation are those. As this is a private initiative, the authorities will not be directly involved in the body, but they will, of course, be very interested in how it will develop.

The certificate should be openly published to promote transparency.

All actors are invited to have their say as the certification criterias are developed. However, in the steering committee, the stakeholders who have some acting capacity, will have a seat.

Retailers and food industry ownership is not just for the galleries, as it should lead to those actors taking responsibility for the system.

The costs will be beared by the water treatment plants.

The organisational parts will be in place this spring and the first plants to be inspected, and hopefully certified, have to sign in this summer.

We calculate that the system from the start will cover about 50% of the sludge produced in Sweden.

The idea about a multi ownership is that all actors then should take their responsibility and fulfil their commitment to a sustainable development.

I propose European Water Association to initiate a technical working group consisting of the different member states who today have, or are developing, a quality assurance system. I am convinced that a harmonisation of these systems will make our position stronger in the discussion of the eventually new directive.

This should also serve as a model for other national organisations developing their systems.

Thank You for Your attention.

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