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TOPICAL TOP STORY

Manure spreading not just farm-based

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An Oxbo 5105 self-propelled spreader applies biosolids on a farm that's participating in the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District's Biosolids Recycling Program. Contributed

Lynn Grooms

MADISON, Wis. – Dairy and livestock farmers aren't the only businesses using manure spreaders. Some sewerage districts use the equipment to apply treated biosolids to farm fields.

The Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District applies biosolids to about 5,000 acres every year; the product is called Metrogro. It's treated to control pathogens and is spread on participating farms within about a 35-mile radius of Madison. Metrogro can be injected into the soil with certain spreader applicators. With injection, application of biosolids is precise; the potential for erosion and runoff is reduced, the district states.

Advances in agricultural technology have helped the district, said Kim Meyer, a certified crop adviser, agronomist and watershed-programs coordinator at the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District. The district is now using three self-propelled spreaders made by Oxbo International, a manufacturer of specialty agriculture equipment. The district purchased its first spreader in 2019. Overall it would be good to have five of them to handle the amount of acres, she said.

The Oxbo spreaders feature all-wheel drive with a short turning radius so it's easy to maneuver in farm fields, she said. Another reason the district chose the Oxbo 5105 spreaders was the machines can be driven at a speed of as much as 32 miles per hour. That's important given that the equipment needs to travel quickly from field to field and on roadways.

And additional tank capacity has helped the district apply biosolids more quickly. Previously used TerraGators could hold 4,200 gallons while the new spreaders hold 6,600 gallons. They also feature a loading arm, which is used to transfer biosolids from a tanker truck to the spreader.

"We can now handle 40 percent more truckloads per day because the 'superloader' fills the spreader in 1.5 minutes," she said. "We want to empty the truck and keep moving."

The self-propelled spreader can move to a ditch and be loaded by the tanker at the roadside.

Steve Pesik, marketing projects coordinator for Oxbo, said the older spreaders couldn't hold a semi-tractor-trailer load so the district would sometimes need to provide an auxiliary tank. Now it doesn't need to have both a tanker and a spreader on the fields. With fewer wheels moving over a field, there's less soil compaction.

Meyer said Oxbo connected the district with Zimmerman Manufacturing, which manufactures drag toolbars and reduced-disturbance manure-injection equipment.

Reduced-disturbance manure-injection technology enables the district's applicators to move through heavy-residue fields without needing to chop stalks, Pesik said.

"Leaving residue in the field helps to conserve nutrients and protect soil from erosion," he said.

The sewerage district applies biosolids to farm fields three times per year, Meyer said.

- in spring between April and May
- in summer from middle-July to the end of that month
- in fall after soybeans and corn have been harvested

The spreaders feature autosteer plus the district can set a desired application rate. The district also can download maps showing where biosolids are spread in fields and the amount applied, for verification purposes.

"Telematics enable us to know where to send tanker trucks," Meyer said. "Once we have an entire fleet we'll be able to improve data management."

She said that mapping information is useful to farmers.

With the current expense of synthetic fertilizers, farmers are saving money by applying biosolids, Pesik said.

"The professionals at the sewerage district are involved in resource recovery," he said. "They're taking sludge, applying it to fields and making good use of it."

Visit **madsewer.org** and **oxbo.com** for more information.

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