

Ag Plastics Recycling – Don't Burn It, Bale It!

Many farmers in Washington County use plastic in their day to day activities to improve the quality of feed for their animals, control weeds, or grow crops in the off season. Agricultural plastics, greenhouse films and row covers are handy items when it comes to producing food in a cheaper more efficient manner; until it comes time to dispose of the plastic at the end of its useful life. Then the big question is “What to do with it?” It being a large, dirty, smelly mess of plastic that provides a great environment for mosquitoes to breed, gets caught in the wind, and trapped in trees. When these plastic products have outlived their usefulness in the past, they have generally been burned or buried on site and sometimes recycled.

Burying is less than ideal as plastic has a long life and does not break down and decompose into the soil, so it creates the potential for a muddy mess and contamination if someone decides to dig there in the future. Burning plastics is also not a good idea as it releases harmful toxins into the atmosphere that in turn can pollute water sources, kill vegetation, and can increase the risk of asthma, allergies and certain type's of cancer in people. All in all not a good option either. Recycling is the most desirable outcome for used agricultural plastics; however, due to the nature of its use, the plastic is not always in a form desired by plastics recyclers. It can be very dirty, bulky and hard to handle in its used state.

Enter the Recycling Ag Plastics Project, or RAPP for short, is trying to work with the users of these materials to educate them regarding the hazards of non-recycling and the benefits of proper management practices to produce a cleaner handier product that is more conducive to being recycled. The Ag Plastics Baler has the potential to help with part of this problem by helping to consolidate the plastic into a regular square unit that is more easily handled by equipment for storage and transportation. The other parts of this equation are the **Best Management Practices for preparing these plastics to be baled.**

Typically the plastic gets pulled off the silage pile or bale or row crops and is wadded up and shoved into a corner or pushed out of the way with a bucket loader or skid steer whenever it gets in the way of operations. This does not look good and is prohibitive to producing an end product that is desired by recyclers. To produce a desirable end product **Best Management Practices** should be employed by those using the plastics.

The important points to remember when it comes to being able to bale and recycle the used Ag Plastics are:

- >Keep it as **CLEAN** as possible, shake or brush off any dirt or silage
- >Keep it as **DRY** as possible to help with cleanup and to prohibit smell and mosquitoes
- >Keep like products together; silage plastic and bale wrap **can not** be mixed, same with bale netting and row crop covers.
- >Cutting the plastic into small manageable pieces and then **rolling them up into a pillow sized bundle** and tying it with a strip of the same plastic is a very effective way of handling plastic for loading into the plastics baler.

Taking a few minutes to do this once a day is easier than trying to do a large amount once a month.

To keep the plastic dry some farms have used calf hutches or stock trailers that are no longer in use, stored it in a nearby shed or it could be covered with a tarp or another piece of used plastic.

The Ag Plastics will be at the Washington County Fair at the County Bounty building for people to view and it will be at farms in the southern end of the county for baling demos the week after the fair.

The schedule is as follows:

- Aug 31 from noon to 3 pm at Mike Morehouse's farm Rte 40 in Greenwich
- Sept 1 at Allenwaite farm in Easton
- Sept 2 at Tiashoke Farm in Easton
- Sept 3 at Beech Hill Farm on North Road in Greenwich.

