

Ecology Action Centre (EAC)
Food Action Committee (FAC)

Position Statement on the Land Application of Biosolids in Nova Scotia to Agricultural Lands

The FAC does not support the application of biosolids onto agricultural land in Nova Scotia. The FAC promotes ecological agricultural practices and biosolids do not meet organic standards for use as a nutrient amendment (Canada General Standards Board, Oct 2008). The FAC does recognize the appeal of biosolids because they represent a beneficial reuse of a waste product. However, because biosolids are the product of municipal wastewater systems, which have inputs ranging from human waste to toxic industrial chemicals there continues to be many questions about the eventual fate of the various organic and inorganic contaminants and pathogens contained within biosolids. The FAC also has concerns about the current interpretation, application and enforcement of the Nova Scotia guidelines for the land application of biosolids.

For example, it would appear that when it comes to applying biosolids to agricultural lands in Nova Scotia, the onus of environmental responsibility falls unfairly on the end user, typically the farmer. It is our position that the biosolids producers should accept more of this responsibility because many of the risks associated with use of biosolids on agricultural lands are not addressed in the guidelines and are not well understood by the end users. This is of particular concern with respect to pharmaceuticals, personal care products and cleaning products (PPCPs).

In short, the FAC feels that there is a lack of transparency and communication with regards to the production and distribution of biosolids in Nova Scotia. How does the public know that the biosolids being produced are meeting the guidelines and what class of biosolids are produced at each production facility? Does the Department of Environment have the resources to ensure that producers and users are meeting the existing guidelines? The FAC would like to see the biosolids being produced in this province tested by an accredited, independent laboratory and the results communicated to end users and any residents who may be affected by the use of biosolids on agricultural land.

The current global economic situation has increased the costs of commercial fertilizers and this may make biosolids a more attractive, lower cost nutrient amendment option for many farmers in Nova Scotia. This will increase the need for better management of this complicated and controversial issue by the provincial government to minimize the risks to food production in Nova Scotia.

The following is a list of questions from the FAC that remain unanswered at this point in time:

- Can Nova Scotia residents expect labelling of products grown using biosolids?
- What testing and treatment, if any, is being done for PPCPs?
- How do these different PPCPs interact in the environment and move through the soil, water and food systems?
- One biosolids production process in NS is using cement kiln dust (CKD). Is testing done on those biosolids with regards to CKD related contaminants, such as thallium?

- Who stands to reap the greatest financial benefit from the disposal of biosolids on agricultural lands (e.g. Municipalities, Production Facilities)?