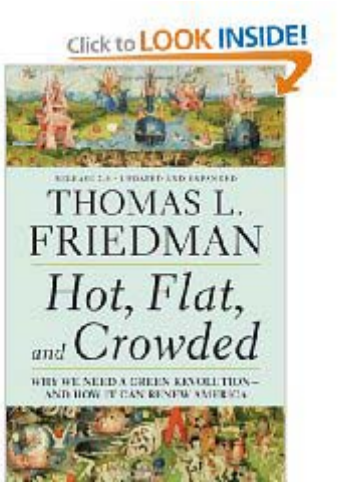
O2Compost
Compost Systems & Training

Sustainability – What Does it Mean for Horse Farms in America?

In today's world of information overload, we frequently adopt words without giving much consideration to their underlying meaning. Sustainability is a word that has significant meaning in virtually every context.

In his book "Hot, Flat and Crowded"[(1)], Thomas Friedman states: "In both the natural world and the financial world, (Sustainability) means that you think and then behave in a way that literally sustains – sustains the natural world around you, sustains business relationships, sustains personal relationships, sustains your community, sustains your country, sustains the planet, and sustains your relationships with your grandchildren and with generations to come".



He goes on to say, "Laws and regulations tell you what you can do, but values tell you what you should do. There is a difference between doing that which you have a right to do and doing what is right".

What then does Sustainability mean for horse farms in America, and in fact horse farms world-wide? In the context of the natural world, Sustainability means "nutrient management". Virtually every farm imports nutrients in the form of feed – hay, alfalfa and grains – and the nutrients that pass through the horse are excreted as urine and feces. This "manure" **WILL** impact the environment - this impact will either be deleterious or advantageous, depending on how we choose to manage it. This is a choice that every horse owner makes either consciously or by default. In this context, establishing a sustainable farm requires a person to take action.

The nutrients in raw manure (specifically Nitrogen as Ammonium) are inherently unstable and will quickly leach into the soil, or runoff into our local waterways. If unmanaged, these nutrients will adversely impact water quality with the downstream (literal) effect of degrading habitat for aquatic life and every dependent life form up the food chain, including humans. Many regulations that effect small farms relate to protecting local watersheds, and there is no "Grandfathering" when it comes to protecting water quality.

This brings us to composting using the O_2Compost System. By maintaining aerobic conditions within the compost pile, we optimize the biology of the system with the net result of: 1) producing heat to destroy pathogens, parasites and weed seeds in the mix; and 2) converting the nutrients to a stable, plant available form (Nitrogen as Nitrate). This form of Nitrogen is released slowly to plants in conjunction with a complex life-system referred to as the "Soil Food Web". The obvious benefits of using a stable compost include vibrant plant growth and healthier horses. Compost applied to pastures also reduces soil compaction, improves water infiltration and overall water quality. The organic matter in the compost has high moisture holding capacity, providing drought resistance and an extended the growing season. There is no down side.

Composting your horse manure, in short, is a simple and effective, if not essential sustainable farming practice that can be utilized on virtually every farm, with one horse or a thousand.

(1) "Hot, Flat and Crowded - Why we Need a Green Revolution and How it can Renew America" by Thomas L. Friedman, 2009.

This is - ***by far*** - the most informative, well researched book I have every read on the topic of man's impact on the planet Earth and how we can achieve Sustainability. It is must reading for those who question the veracity of Global Warming, the impacts of Climate Change and the effect that each of us is having on future generations.