

# BERKS & BEYOND

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## Moving on?

Tulpehocken schools chief may take \$25,000 cut for job in western Pennsylvania. **B2**

# State tests farm sludge

Readings are taken at a Greenwich Township farm after the state Health Department receives odor complaints. Sludge is derived from the treatment of human waste.

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By **Darrin Youker**  
Reading Eagle

Larry Kehl's 166-acre hay fields in Greenwich Township became a testing ground Monday in the continuing debate over the use of sewage sludge on farms.

Crews from the state Department of Health and Department of Environmental Protection were on hand with a mobile laboratory and monitoring equipment as sludge — the solids that result from treating waste water — was applied to Kehl's fresh-cut fields.

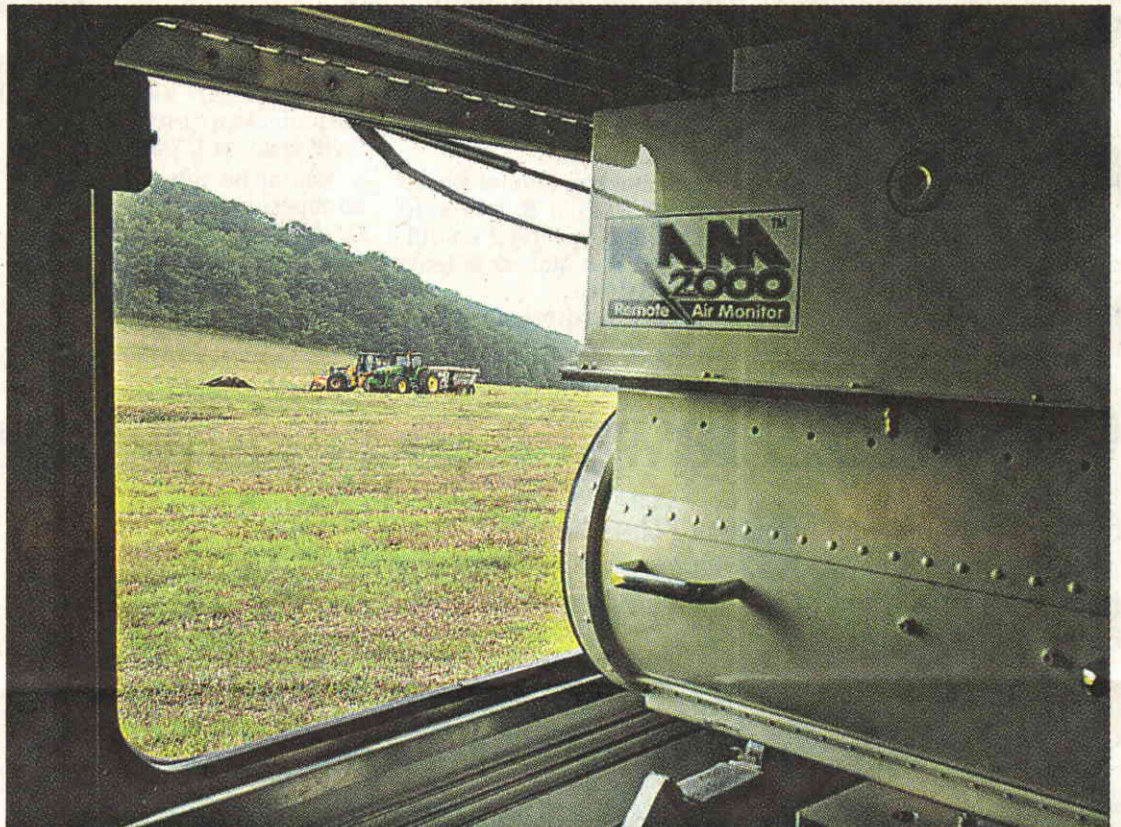
The extensive testing, a first for Berks County, has been done only a handful of times elsewhere in the state.

"We do get complaints about these farms and we do want to address them," said Lori Lebo, spokeswoman for the DEP.

The use of sludge — also known as bio-solids — is a hot issue with residents concerned about odors and possible health and environmental risks, Lebo said. In Berks, those concerns have some residents pushing to limit sludge use.

The testing DEP did at Kehl's farm was requested by the Health Department because of odor complaints, Lebo said.

Health Department staff will analyze the data, she said.



Reading Eagle: Ryan McFadden



The view, above, from the state Department of Environmental Protection's mobile analytical unit on the Greenwich Township farm of Larry Kehl. An infrared beam is used Monday to measure odor from fresh sludge spraying. Diane Cline, a DEP chemist, left, uses an Aroma Scan to take measurements. Behind a sludge trailer, below, is a reflector off of which operators bounce an infrared beam to measure odors.

Department officials could not be reached.

According to Kimberly Fies, a conservation specialist with the county conservation district, Kehl's farm is a special case.

Many farmers have the sludge applied during the spring plowing when it is cooler. The mid-summer applications on Kehl's fields follow his hay harvest.

"If you are going to get an odor, it will be in this setting," Fies said. "If there is a site to be picked, this is the one."

For the past 10 years, the sludge Kehl has used has been supplied, hauled and spread by Synagro Technologies Inc., Houston.

Kehl said he hasn't had any direct complaints from neighbors but that they are addressed to Synagro or the state.

**Sludge** continues on B2



## Sludge | State tests for odors on Greenwich Township farm

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Kehl also said he's pleased with what sludge does for his fields.

"See this?" he said, turning over brown topsoil with his boot heel. "This adds nutrients to my soil."

The Synagro crews that spread sludge Monday used a tractor hauling a manure spreader to make dozens of passes on the sloping hay field. The spreader left behind a thin black layer of sludge and a noticeable odor of ammonia.

Inside the mobile laboratory, DEP experts used monitors to measure the levels of ammonia, methane and other chemical compounds coming off the sludge.

"We are looking at odors, and their concentrations," said DEP chemist Thomas Richards.

Synagro's technical service

director for Pennsylvania, Mark D. Reider, also was on hand Monday for the testing. One question he had was what the upshot would be.

"We don't know what they are doing and what this data will be used for," he said. "Is this going to be used for some policy decision?"

He wondered whether farms that don't use sludge would face the same scrutiny since manure odors are associated with almost every kind of farming operation.

But Fies held out the possibility that the testing might ease concerns about the use of bio-solids.

A primary complaint is odors and the effects they have on people, she said.

"If they do find something, maybe we need to make adjustments," Fies said.

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