



SINCE EARLY 1992 A.W. Clemmons has been a contract grower for a major pork producer, feeding nearly 2,450 hogs a day on a four-generation family farm at Bolivia. The waste treatment lagoon is to Clemmons' right and the two hog parlors to his left.



ON-FARM RECYCLING: Waste pumped automatically from the hog parlors decomposes by anaerobic bacterial action in this lagoon. With the effluent, Clemmons spray irrigates and fertilizes a field of coastal bermuda hay, which is grazed by a small herd of beef cattle.

ALL ANIMAL WASTES RECYCLED ON THE FARM

A.W. Clemmons Built Swine Facility 'Right To Start With'

BY SUSAN USHER

Fat sows and an ornery boar, rooting around in a puddle of oozing black mud under a stand of trees down by the creek, reeking of manure.

If that's your idea of a hog farm, think again.

That traditional hog pen is fast disappearing, in part because raising swine is now big business, and in part because of changing regulations that reflect an increased concern for the environment.

A.W. Clemmons of Bolivia runs what could be considered a state-of-the-art, mid-sized hog operation. Since 1992 the Clemmons family has run a grow-out operation under contract with a major pork producer.

His operation, like most of those built within the past two years, is expected to meet or exceed new regulatory standards, said Mamie Wilson, administrative conservationist with the local U.S. Soil Conservation Service office.

"I done it right to start with," Clemmons said. "We pump at the right rate so there's no run-off."

Though Clemmons already owned the land, his hog operation was still a major investment. He spent \$180,000 building what is considered a moderate-sized swine operation. That covers the \$22,000 pump irrigation system, the 1.8-acre lagoon with berm, and two hog parlors with galvanized steel sides, concrete feeding floors with mesh screen windows, automatic waste flushing and temperature-triggered drip-cooling.

"You can figure \$200,000, counting seeding, to do it like it's got to be done," said Clemmons.

The operation appears to be a model of efficiency as well as good land stewardship.

Roughly three times a year, nearly 2,500 young pigs arrive by truck, weighing 35 pounds each on average. When they ship out 120 days later, they weigh between 240 and

250 pounds and will be eating a combined 90,000 pounds of feed a week.

"These are hybrids that don't yield much fatback," said Clemmons. "With the fat from the whole lot you probably couldn't fill a lard can."

Their compact bodies are not only lean, but generally odor free and clean.

Animal waste run-off isn't a problem. The operation is located a good distance away from water sources that could be accidentally polluted and all waste is collected, treated

and recycled on site.

With cleanliness a high priority both for aesthetic and sanitary reasons, odor is not a problem—not around the operation itself or downwind for nearby residents, including a renter in a mobile home near the farm and family members.

"When you have an operation run like it's supposed to be, you won't have that," said Clemmons. "I didn't come here to do this and aggravate my neighbors. I live here and my children live nearby."

Walking through one of the hog parlors, Clemmons says, "They say having hogs causes flies, but they would have to prove it to me."

Gesturing about the building, he continues, "See, there are no flies here."

Each building holds 40 pens, 27 feet by 12 feet, with approximately 33 hogs to a pen. A center walkway runs between the two long rows of pens.

As Clemmons reaches over to scratch an inquisitive pig on the snout, an automatic overhead sprinkler begins spraying a fine mist onto the backs of the pigs. Anytime the inside temperature reaches 80 degrees, the sprinklers come on three minutes out of every 10 minutes. If the heat gets excessive a second set of sprinklers comes into play. Recently installed equipment also monitors relative humidity.

The pigs require some training when they first arrive. Clemmons points to the layout of the pens, each with a solid pad toward the inside and a slatted, wet area on the outside nearest the screened windows. "We put their food high on the inside and activate the sprinklers at the waste area. The pigs like to eliminate where it's wet."

Their training works, resulting in pens that stay unusually clean and waste free.

Waste falls through the slats to a sluice below. The area is flushed au-



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tomatically every two hours with 450 gallons of water. Wastewater flows through piping into a 10-foot deep, 1.8-acre lagoon, where anaerobic bacterial action helps break down the waste and solids settle.

Clemmons periodically sprays the resulting nutrient-rich effluent as fertilizer onto 52 acres of pasture—more than twice what he is required to have—in a deliberate effort to contain all waste on-site through recycling.

A small herd of cattle—32 head—grazes the coastal bermuda hay. "I don't want to overgraze," says

Clemmons.

The hogs and cattle both provide ways to diversify income from the land first farmed by his grandfather, the late Alfred Wright Clemmons, and now farmed by Clemmons and two of his four sons, Alan Dale and Ricky. This year they also put 150 acres in corn, 600 acres in soybeans, 85 acres in tobacco and 1,000 acres in wheat.

Clemmons, 60, has farmed most of his life, and enjoys what he does now "the best of everything I've done," he says. "I spend a lot of time in here."

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