

# Biosolids Facts

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**Q. How important are biosolids to Pennsylvania agriculture?**

**A. For individual farmers, biosolids can mean the difference between profit and loss.**

Production agriculture is an important part of the Pennsylvania Economy. For example, in 2007, the total value of farm production in the state exceeded \$5.8 billion, and the sector provided more than 84,300 jobs. According the Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service, the state has more than 59,000 farms, comprising 7.7 million acres.

While the impact of land application on communities is very small, the benefits to the small family farms that receive biosolids are significant. Given the current high cost of commercial fertilizer, the nutrient and soil amendment value of biosolids to a farmer in Pennsylvania is estimated to be from \$150 to \$200 an acre. With the average farm size in the Commonwealth at about 124 acres, this could mean a savings of \$18,000 to \$27,500 every two or three years, since a farm field typically won't receive biosolids every year, depending on the needs of the crops and the soil. The average annual market value of production for a farm in Pennsylvania is estimated to be \$91,965, so it's clear that the savings from biosolids can be significant to the average farmer.

Contrary to some claims, the use of biosolids in Pennsylvania is not widespread. According to Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, less than 4/10 of 1 percent of available farmland in Pennsylvania received biosolids in 2008 – a total of only 11,000 acres.

A number of factors serve to limit the use of biosolids in Pennsylvania: Some land is not suitable because of crops, slopes that are too steep or soils that are too shallow and over bedrock or high water tables. Some farmers prefer not to use biosolids. Nutrient management plans for tracts receiving biosolids typically limit applications to once every three years or more. The availability of class B biosolids is also a factor, since Pennsylvania wastewater treatment plants do not produce enough biosolids to meet the demands of Pennsylvania farmers. The supply of biosolids from other states is also inadequate to meet demand.