NEWS

"FISHNURE"

Arkansas catfish farmer turns pond sludge into potent compost

Fishcat Farm owner-operator Jim White has been running his channel catfish operation for close to 13 years, and admits it's been "an up and down industry." Recently he's come across a very useful supplement to his income: producing FishNure, the name he has registered for a nutritional supplement for different crops.

White's farm in Lake Village, on the Mississippi River in Arkansas, has four employees in addition to White, covers about 160 acres and has 12 ponds, and eight large raceways with high volumes of catfish in them.

To make FishNure, White and his staff vacuum out the waste from the bottom of the raceways, dewater it, mix it with some oat straw to aid in the composting process, and then add a small amount of Mississippi river alluvial clay from the bottom of the ponds.

The clay binds the carbon into a form that remains in the soil as stable organic matter. Once the decomposition of the fish manure and the carbon source has converted the substances into a nutrient source, the farm sells the FishNure – in 16-lb or 32-lb units – shipping them all over the US. A 16-lb shipment costs $23.95 (shipping within the US included.)

To date, White said, FishNure has been sold in 33 states. The feedback he's been receiving indicates that FishNure speeds up the growth of vegetables and other plants by three to four times. "It's similar to what you'd get in an aquaponics system," says White.

On the farm, White said, the composting material is piled into covered windrows to dewater and cure, with the windrows measuring 4.5-5ft high and 10 ft long and stretching anywhere between 40 and 50 ft long. The resulting compost is a soft putty-like substance that helps bind it into the soil where it's applied. It can be applied as a solid or can be diluted with water.

– Quentin Dodd

Waste from the bottom of eight floating catfish raceways is removed and used to form basis of compost.

Fishnure dewatering box.

The compost mixture is put in windrows and covered to cure.