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# BIOSOLIDS: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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**Q. How much land is receiving biosolids in Virginia?**

**A. Only 49,922 acres of more than 8.6 million acres of farmland received biosolids in 2005.**

Together, agriculture and forestry are Virginia's number one industry, contributing more than \$47 billion each year to the state economy and generating more than 15% of total state employment. The Commonwealth of Virginia is a big state, with more than 8.6 million acres devoted to agriculture and another 15.8 million acres of forestland.

For a number of Virginia farmers, the use of biosolids has become an important resource in the cultivation of such feed crops as hay, soybeans and corn. Many farmers report that productivity can double on land receiving biosolids. This improved productivity is important to a farmer's quality of life, the local and state economy and the preservation of Virginia's agricultural open space.

Some sustainably managed forests in Virginia also benefit from the application of biosolids, although the actual number of acres of forestland receiving biosolids is very small.

Contrary to some claims, the use of biosolids in Virginia is not widespread. According to the Virginia Department of Health, which regulates the land application of biosolids in Virginia, less than 6/10ths of 1 percent of available farmland in Virginia received biosolids in 2005 – a total of only 49,922 acres, less than the 50,488 acres applied in 2004.

The amount of farmland permitted for biosolids in Virginia is only 350,000 acres, which means that only about 14 percent of farmland permitted for biosolids actually received an application in 2005.

A number of factors serve to limit the use of biosolids in Virginia: 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 Virginia's wastewater treatment plants do not produce enough biosolids to meet the demands of Virginia's farmers. The supply of biosolids from other states is also inadequate to meet demand.

