

Date of Hearing: March 26, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Esmeralda Soria, Chair

AB 411 (Papan) – As Amended February 24, 2025

SUBJECT: Livestock carcasses: disposal: composting

SUMMARY: This bill would allow any part of a livestock carcass resulting from a routine livestock mortality event or on-farm processing to be composted if certain requirements are met, including, among others, that the composting is conducted in accordance with best management practices for livestock composting approved by the Secretary of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). Specifically, *this bill*:

- 1) Allows any part of a livestock carcass resulting from a routine livestock mortality event or on-farm processing may be composted if all of the following requirements are met:
 - a) The composting of the carcass is conducted in accordance with best management practices for livestock composting approved by the secretary in consultation with the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery and the State Water Resources Control Board.
 - b) No more than 100 cubic yards of livestock carcasses are composted at a site at any one time.
 - c) All composting material comes from an owned or leased agricultural site.
 - d) If the livestock carcass is composted at a place other than the agricultural site where the livestock died, any cured compost returns to the agricultural site or is taken to a source approved by the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery to receive cured compost.
- 2) Defines the following:
 - a) “Livestock” means burros, cattle, goats, horses, mules, sheep, swine and other large domesticated animals and poultry, per section 19201.
 - b) “On-farm processing” means the slaughter of the livestock under circumstances authorized by subdivision (c) of Section 19020 dealing with mobile slaughter operators.
 - c) “Routine livestock mortality event” means the death of the livestock from a natural cause. “Routine livestock mortality event” does not include any of the following:
 - i) The death of the livestock due to being euthanized using barbiturates.
 - ii) The death of the livestock from a disease listed on the department’s List of Reportable Conditions for Animals and Animal Products.
 - iii) The death of the livestock in a location that is under a quarantine imposed by the State Veterinarian.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Prohibits a dead animal hauler or any other person from transporting a dead animal to any place, other than to certain specified facilities or destinations, unless a certain waiver is granted by the State Veterinarian, as specified.
- 2) Requires the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (DRRR) to adopt and revise minimum standards for solid waste handling, transfer, composting, transformation, and disposal, as prescribed.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: This bill allows for on-farm composting of routine livestock mortalities and slaughter waste, which is an effective, environmentally friendly, and economically viable solution to current, unfeasible carcass and slaughter-waste disposal options. Composting has been scientifically demonstrated to drastically reduce conflicts between livestock and predators (compared to bone piles). This bill will thus benefit ranchers and wildlife alike, in addition to reducing environmental health hazards and nuisances and improving the economic viability of small family ranches and those that utilize small-scale slaughter operations.

Regulations approved by CalRecycle currently prohibit “composting of unprocessed mammalian tissue, including but not limited to, flesh, organs, hide, blood, bone and marrow” (14 CCR § 17855.2(a)). As a result of this prohibition, current options for disposing of livestock carcasses resulting from routine on-ranch mortalities are limited.

The preferred methods of disposal are shipping to a rendering facility or burial. With only three major rendering facilities remaining in California and a limited number of licensed haulers legally permitted to haul carcasses to those facilities, rendering facilities are entirely out of reach for many ranchers (particularly in the northern region of the state) and hauling is prohibitively expensive for many others.

In addition to state and regional water board regulations, each county in California has unique restrictions on where carcasses can be buried (distance from waterways, groundwater, etc.). Additionally, rugged terrain, seasonal climatic challenges, and the need for equipment suitable to bury a carcass 6-7 feet below the surface present incredible logistical challenges to effective burial for many ranchers.

Regulatory complexity and a lack of effective carcass disposal infrastructure has resulted in an extremely burdensome process for those seeking to dispose of livestock. Many ranchers are left with just two options: they can leave carcasses to decompose naturally, or move them to carcass disposal pits, also known as bone piles. Unfortunately, both of these options can lead to unwanted livestock-predator interactions, as bone piles can be a food source for predators and effectively draw predators to the area, where they may prey upon live animals, creating a vicious cycle. Additionally, leaving a carcass to decompose naturally can pose health or environmental hazards or public nuisance.

According to the author, this bill offers ranchers a practical and environmentally friendly method of handling livestock carcasses by allowing them to compost the remains on-site. Currently,

composting is not allowed. As such, many ranchers face significant challenges disposing of livestock remains. While they can transmit the remains to a rendering facility, often such facilities are out of reach, leaving ranchers with limited and less-than-ideal options. They can let carcasses decompose naturally, move them to disposal pits or bone piles or bury them. Unfortunately, decomposition and bone piles attract predators, leading to dangerous interactions with live animals. Decomposition can also lead to serious health and environmental concerns. Bone burial is subject to complex regional regulations that make the method costly. On-site composting is a sustainable, cost-effective option that allows ranchers to manage their operations efficiently, safely, and responsibly. This bill offers a proactive approach to protecting both livestock and the environment.

Supporter's state composting of routine livestock mortalities is currently allowed in 42 other states, with at least one other state moving to authorize the practice this year. In California, the practice can already be employed under a waiver granted during declared emergencies for extreme heat, natural disasters, or other emergency conditions. For more than seven years, researchers at CSU Chico and the U.C. Cooperative Extension have conducted pilot research into the feasibility, efficacy, and safety of routine mortality composting in California under the supervision of CDFA, CalRecycle, and the Water Boards. The body of research from California and elsewhere has demonstrated that livestock mortality composting does not pose a health risk to humans or animals and is ecologically sound when implemented using standard BMPs.

Opponent's state while they empathize with farmers and ranchers who face challenges in managing livestock mortalities where rendering services are unavailable, they are concerned that this is overly broad in its application, bypassing existing law and creating the potential for unregulated composting operations statewide, even where they could harm public health and safety or where rendering services are available. As such, opponents suggest the bill should be narrowed to address legitimate concerns in rural Northern California counties or areas with limited access to rendering facilities.

Opponents recommend the following amendments:

- 1) **Limit the scope to farmers and ranchers.** The bill currently includes mobile animal harvesting facilities, which generate significant amounts of offal, meat, and bone scraps. These operations have specialized equipment and should follow established disposal methods through licensed facilities rather than on-site composting.
- 2) **Ensure compliance with the law by requiring the Director of CDFA to license on-farm composting operations, contingent on inspections and the unavailability of rendering services.** The bill currently permits on-farm composting at any farming operation without oversight by CDFA, the agency otherwise tasked with ensuring the integrity of the human and pet food supply chain. Requiring CDFA to license a facility engaging in composting operations will not only continue the Department's proper oversight of these areas but will also ensure adherence to the bill's requirements.
- 3) **Reduce the allowable amount of mammalian tissue.** The bill permits composting up to 100 cubic yards of tissue—far exceeding what is necessary for individual ranch mortalities. A single bovine produces 1.5–2 cubic yards of material, requiring 3–5 times that volume in composting medium. This could amount to 400–600 cubic yards of compost, equivalent to 35–45 dump truckloads—a scale posing significant environmental and food safety risks.

- 4) **Mandate composting facility requirements and best management practices.** Unlike yard waste, mammalian tissue presents far greater risks. Yet, the bill sidesteps composting facility regulations in favor of undefined best management practices. Proper facility oversight is essential to mitigate threats to the environment and food supply.
- 5) **Limit applicability to mortalities occurring outside of existing rendering facility service areas.** Focus the additional management options to Northern California counties where service is severely limited.

Rendering

Rendering is the process of converting recently deceased livestock and other inedible materials, such as inedible kitchen grease (IKG) into useful byproducts such as feed protein. Rendering converts low value material into stable useable materials. Most of this material comes from slaughterhouses (packinghouse waste), food processing facilities and restaurants (in the form of Inedible Kitchen Grease (IKG) commonly called Used Cooking Oil (UKO)). Safe rendered products are used in the manufacturing of many products from pet foods to cosmetics and other everyday products. The Meat, Poultry and Egg Safety Branch (MPES) licenses and inspects rendering facilities throughout the state for compliance with regulations to ensure that the associated inedible products are handled in a safe manner, protecting human health, animal health, the environment so that this material is not allowed to enter the human food supply.

As of 2024, there are 47 dead animal hauler companies licensed in California and five extreme heat rendering facilities (EHRF). Three of the facilities are located in the central valley (Fresno to Sacramento, one in San Bernardino County and one in Sonoma County). There are only five dead animal hauler companies between Sacramento and the Oregon border.

Burial on farm or ranch

According to FAC 19348, for routine livestock mortality, animal owners can choose to bury the animal on the owner's property after the animal dies if the burial is within three (3) miles of where the animal died. If to be disposed of offsite, routine mortality carcasses shall be transported by a CDFA licensed dead animal hauler to a licensed rendering plant, a licensed collection center, an animal disease diagnostic laboratory acceptable to the department, the nearest crematory, or to a destination in another state that has been approved for that purpose by the appropriate authorities in that state.

If an animal dies from a contagious disease, FAC 9143 states that the animal shall not be used for the food of any human being, domestic animal, or fowl. Also, the Natural Resources Code 17823.5 states the carcasses of animals with any contagious disease shall be disposed of by means prescribed by the CDFA's Division of Animal Industry. Additionally, during an emergency, the CDFA may work with Cal EPA, including CalRecycle, the water boards, and local jurisdictions to allow temporary disposal at permitted landfills (e.g. 2018 Camp Fire in Butte County and 2006 heat wave in San Joaquin Valley).

These procedures apply only if there are no local prohibitions or regulations. Additionally, on-site burial of animals must have died on the owner's property and will be buried on the same property, no off-site transportation. This is the least desired option, but it is recognized in remote locations on-site burial may be the only method available. Unconsolidated waste buried in this

matter not only poses a risk to water quality, but also can affect future use of your property.

Procedures for onsite burial include:

- 1) Burial should take place more than 150 feet downslope of nearest domestic well.
- 2) Burial should not be near streams, swales, ponds or in saturated soils.
- 3) Carcasses should be buried in a shallow trench and if available apply lime to the carcass. Excavate at least 7 feet to allow 5 feet of soil cover. Do not put carcass on soil surface and mound soil.
- 4) Keep a record on-site of animals buried, depth of pit, depth of cover and location on property.
- 5) Do not irrigate over the disposal pits.
- 6) Do not bury an animal where you may intend to build a structure in the future.

The committee may wish to consider the following issues:

- 1) How long will it take for CDFA to create best management practices for livestock composting?
- 2) Should local governments have the ability to pass ordinances related to livestock composting, similar to local ordinances related to livestock burial on a farm or ranch?

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Butte County Local Food Network
California Cattlemen's Association
California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)
California Climate & Agriculture Network (CALCAN)
California Farm Bureau
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Wool Growers Association
Californians Against Waste
Defenders of Wildlife
People Food and Land Foundation
Roots of Change
Tomkat Ranch
Western United Dairies

Oppose Unless Amended

Pacific Coast Renderers Association

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