

Recycling Agricultural Plastics in New York State:

Report and Website Encourage Alternatives to Burning, Burying, and Dumping

Plastics are used increasingly in all sectors of agriculture:

Dairies use plastics in silage bags, bunker silo covers, bale wraps and twines.

Nurseries use plastic hoophouse covers, trays and containers. Plastics are used as row covers, mulch films and drip tape in fruit and vegetable production.

Plastic pesticide containers are used throughout the industry.

Plastics are substituted for the longer lasting materials previously used because they often cost less and improve production efficiency (e.g., plastic silage bags result in better feed quality).

But what happens to the plastic after its useful life on-the-farm? As with many throwaway products, disposal is a problem. Because "ag plastics" are typically dirtier than most used plastics, there have been obstacles to recycling.

Surveys indicate that more than half the agricultural plastics in NYS are disposed by open burning, which releases high levels of polluting emissions.

Most of the rest is buried or dumped on-farm.

Recycling Agricultural Plastics in New York State, by Lois Levitan and Ana Barros, is a 30-page report released in Spring 2003 by Cornell's Environmental Risk Analysis Program (ERAP). It describes emerging off-farm recycling and re-processing alternatives for disposing of agricultural plastics.

The report and other resources to help make agricultural plastics recycling a reality in NYS are posted on the web at:

<http://environmentalrisk.cornell.edu/C&ER/PlasticsDisposal/AgPlasticsRecycling/>.

For more information or paper copy—for those without web access—contact the Environmental Risk Analysis Program at Cornell <enrisk@cornell.edu>.