

# BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

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[www.bredl.org](http://www.bredl.org)

## Farmers, Fertilizer and Fibrowatt

### Fertilizer Is Too Valuable To Burn

Burning poultry litter robs farmers of a valuable resource, raises food prices for consumers and puts nitrogen where it does the most harm: in the air. Requiring poultry litter in a renewable portfolio standard raises the cost of electricity to ratepayers. North Carolina must reconsider a misguided policy that subsidizes dirty energy at the expense of our agricultural economy. It is not too late for farmers, consumers, and environmentalists, working with our representatives in Raleigh, to implement a clean renewable energy program that protects the environment and preserves agricultural resources. ***Nitrogen belongs in the ground, not in the air.***

### The Rising Cost of Fertilizer

Rising global demand for food, the ethanol boom, rapid increases in natural gas and diesel fuel, and the falling dollar have all combined to drive up prices farmers pay for conventional fertilizers. The Fertilizer Institute <http://www.tfi.org/> reports a **228% increase** in fertilizer prices between January 2000 and April 2008 when costs reached record levels. As natural gas supplies remain tight, fertilizer imports grow, and the dollar continues to decline, the price for fertilizer will become a bigger burden for North Carolina farmers and contribute to higher food prices for consumers.

### Poultry Litter For Fertilizer Is In Demand

Even as Fibrowatt was promising announcements of new plants, farmers across North Carolina were scrambling to find poultry litter to meet their fertilizer needs. In Wilkes and Surry Counties, where Fibrowatt is proposing another poultry waste incinerator, prices range from \$7.00 to \$25.00 per ton compared to the \$2.00-\$2.50 offered in Fibrowatt's contracts. Prices in other poultry producing regions are up to **\$35-\$40** per ton. In eastern North Carolina's Robeson County, Extension Agent James Parsons said poultry litter was in high demand and that he had "not heard of a poultry farmer recently that had difficulty finding a home for his litter."

### Poultry Litter Supply Is Unreliable

According to a report prepared by La Capra Associates for the NC Utilities Commission, there are questions about the availability of poultry litter for fuel. "One uncertainty related to this resource is that the biomass facilities may be **competing directly with farmers for poultry litter**, as it is an inexpensive alternative to purchasing industrial fertilizer in times when high fuel prices increase the cost of fertilizer, which has a potential nutrient value of \$20-35/ton." *Analysis of a Renewable Portfolio Standard for the State of North Carolina*, pages 28-29. (emphasis added)

### New Technology Mines Phosphorus in Poultry Litter

Florence SC soil scientists with Agricultural Research Service have announced a new process that removes excess phosphorous from poultry litter to achieve a balanced fertilizer that avoids excessive nutrients. This technology promises to make litter even more attractive to farmers as an alternative to imported synthetic fertilizers.

<http://www.southeastfarmpress.com/news/poultry-litter0312/index.html>

### North Carolina Must Reject Burning Poultry Litter As Renewable Energy.

In 2007 the North Carolina General Assembly adopted a renewable energy portfolio standard that requires utilities to provide 900,000 kilowatt hours of electricity produced from poultry litter. The state's leaders must remove this mandate and implement standards that protect air quality and promote clean energy. ***It is not too late to act.***

May 2008