
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 411 (Papan) - Livestock carcasses: disposal: composting

Version: July 17, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: AGRI. 5 - 0, E.Q. 8 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Robert Ingenito

Bill Summary: AB 411 would permit any part of a livestock carcass resulting from a routine livestock mortality event or on-farm processing to be composted under specified circumstances.

Fiscal Impact:

- The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) indicates that this bill would result in annual General Fund costs of \$225,000 to develop best management practices for livestock composting, including coordination with agencies that have environmental and health oversight, and review and approve adjusted practices to specific environments or available compost inputs. The department notes that the development of best management practices for the State is an on-going responsibility due to (1) region-specific considerations, (2) on-going needs for technical assistance when practices are questioned, and (3) the requirement to update practices as tangential laws and regulations or scientific understanding evolve.
- The Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) and the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) would incur minor and absorbable costs to collaborate with CDFA.

Background: Farmers and ranchers have limited options when it comes to disposing of on-ranch animal mortalities and butcher waste resulting from on-farm slaughter operations. The two most common carcass disposal options include rendering and on-site burial. Other options include landfilling, composting, thermal disposal (incineration), and bone piles (disposal pits). CDFA indicates that there are 21 traditional rendering facilities (though not all accept all carcasses) in California, 57 collection centers, and a limited number of licensed haulers legally permitted to haul carcasses to those facilities. Distance to these facilities puts them out of reach for some ranchers (particularly in the northern region of the state) and hauling is prohibitively expensive for many others.

In addition to state requirements, counties have restrictions on where carcasses may be buried, such as distance from waterways and groundwater. Additionally, rugged terrain, seasonal climatic challenges, and the need for equipment suitable to bury a carcass six to seven feet below the surface present logistical challenges to effective burial in some cases. Consequently, many ranchers are left with just two options: they can leave carcasses to decompose naturally or dump them in bone piles (piles where carcasses are allowed to decompose).

Both of these options can lead to unwanted vectors and livestock-predator interactions. Specifically, bone piles can be a food source for predators (wolves and mountain lions) and effectively draw them to the area, putting living livestock at risk. Additionally, leaving a carcass to decompose naturally can pose health or environmental hazards and create a public nuisance.

In 2022, a study titled “Livestock Mortality Composting to Mitigate Livestock Predator Interactions” provided data on the composting of four adult cows versus nearby bone piles using wildlife trail cameras. The results showed that “Bone piles attracted an average of 390 predator visits in year one and 292 in year two. In contrast, the compost pile had only 8 visits total across both years. The study demonstrated that composting livestock mortalities dramatically reduces the attraction of large predators (e.g., wolves, mountain lions, bears) compared to untreated bone piles.” Additionally, the study documented consistent high temperatures ($\geq 131^{\circ}\text{F}$ for ≥ 72 hours) in the compost piles correlate with pathogen reduction.

Proposed Law: This bill, among other things, would allow any part of a livestock carcass resulting from a routine livestock mortality event or on-farm processing to be composted if all of the following requirements are met:

- The composting of the carcass is conducted in accordance with best management practices for livestock composting adopted by CDFA in collaboration with CalRecycle and the State Water Board. Specify that the best management practices shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following specifications: (1) protection protocols for groundwater, (2) protection of public health and food supply, (3) proper management of compost piles, (4) collaboration procedures with local enforcement agencies, and (5) enforcement and penalties for failing to follow the best management practices.
- The total amount of composting material onsite at any one time does not exceed 100 cubic yards, inclusive of livestock carcasses.
- All composting material, including livestock carcasses, comes from an agricultural site or sites owned or leased by the owner of the livestock carcasses.
- The composting activity occurs on an agricultural site owned or leased by the owner of the livestock carcasses, and if the activity occurs on an agricultural site owned or leased by the owner that is not the site where the carcasses were generated.
 - The activity shall occur in the county in which the carcass was generated or within an adjacent county.
 - The transport of the carcasses shall comply with all applicable state and local laws and regulations.
- After the composting material is converted into cured compost, the cured compost is applied to an agricultural site owned or leased by the owner of the livestock carcasses that produced the cured compost and in compliance with the best management practices adopted, as specified.

- The operator of the composting operation notifies the applicable local enforcement agency of the facility within 30 days of commencing operation, including the location and operator contact information.

Related Legislation: SB 279 (McNerney) would reduce the regulatory requirements for certain composting operations, including for agricultural operations that do not include large-scale animal die off events. This bill is currently pending in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Staff Comments: CDFA notes that current law does not direct it to develop best management practices for livestock composting. Consequently, this bill would create new work by mandating the establishment of technical requirements and development of best management practices that would provide completely new and previously unavailable options for managing ruminant mortalities.

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