Fresh poultry manure on the farm

How to **receive it, cover it, spread it and work it in** so it feeds the soil, **without smells and without flies**.

Potatoes, legumes and cereals · 5-minute read



Step by step

1. **Plan.** Order only what you can **work in within a day or two**.
2. **Unload. In the field**, on high ground, away from water and houses.
3. **Cover.** If it has to wait, **geotextile**. Never plastic.
4. **Spread. A thin, even layer**, no lumps.
5. **Work in. The same day**. By law, within 24 hours.
6. **Wait. 3–4 weeks** before planting or sowing.

An idea by **Matías Cruz González**, a partner at Granja La Cuesta · Made by **WeSite**

STEP 1 / 6

1 Plan before you order



> **Manure that arrives without a plan ends up in a heap. And a heap means smell and flies.**

- [ ] **Ask the supplier for the analysis:** nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and moisture.
- [ ] **Work out the rate** for your crop and your soil (see the rates table).
- [ ] **Pick the day:** little wind and none blowing towards houses, no heavy rain forecast, and the soil not waterlogged.
- [ ] **Order only what you can spread and work in within a day or two**, with the tractor, spreader or crew ready.

STEP 2 / 6

2 Unload in the right place



> **Where you tip it decides how much of a nuisance it is.**

- [ ] **Inside the field** where it will be used, on firm, high, level ground.
- [ ] **Away from water** (ravines, irrigation channels, wells, water galleries and springs) **and away from houses**.
- [ ] **Never in a ravine bed** or wherever water runs when it rains.

STEP 3 / 6

3 If it has to wait, cover it with geotextile



> **A well-covered heap hardly smells, stays dry, and flies cannot lay eggs in it.**

- [ ] **A compact, tall heap**, ridge-shaped, so rain runs off.
- [ ] **Cover it completely with a geotextile sheet** that breathes: non-woven fleece of about 150–300 g/m².
- [ ] **Down to the ground all round**, weighed down with sandbags or stones: no gaps for flies.
- [ ] **No more than 10 days** in the field, and **a single heap** per field.

⚠ **Do not add lime:** it sends ammonia up, smells worse and wastes nitrogen.

Why geotextile and not plastic?



✓ Geotextile sheet

- **It breathes:** steam escapes and the heap does not rot.
- **It keeps rain out:** no runoff across the ground.
- **It stops flies:** they cannot get in to lay their eggs.
- **It lasts:** reusable many times.

✗ Plastic

- **It sweats:** the water stays inside.
- **It ferments** without air and smells worse.
- **When you lift it**, all the smell comes out at once.
- **It tears** and the wind carries it off.

STEP 4 / 6

4 Spread it thin and even



A thin layer dries faster and mixes into the soil better. A lump is a fly nursery.

- [ ] **On prepared, unplanted ground:** never on top of plants or the crop.
- [ ] **More than 5 metres** from ravines and watercourses, and well away from wells, galleries and springs.
- [ ] **A thin, even layer**, lumps broken up, in stretches you can work in straight away.
- [ ] **Early in the morning or towards evening:** it is cooler, so there is less smell and less nitrogen lost.

STEP 5 / 6

5 Work it in straight away



This is the step that removes most smell and most flies.

- [ ] **Right behind:** run the rotavator, cultivator, plough or hoe within the first few hours.
- [ ] **Always within 24 hours** of spreading: the law requires it.
- [ ] **About 10–15 cm** deep, well mixed into the soil.
- [ ] **On sand-mulched plots** (picón or jable): move the sand aside, put the manure on the soil, mix it in and cover again.

STEP 6 / 6

6 Wait before planting



> **Fresh poultry manure is strong: it needs a few weeks in the soil.**

- [ ] **3–4 weeks** between working it in and planting or sowing: any sooner and it can burn seed and roots.
- [ ] **A light watering** if the soil is dry, so it settles, without waterlogging.
- [ ] **For potatoes, only before planting:** never when earthing up or onto the plants.
- [ ] **At least 2 months** between application and harvest, by law.

The deadlines at a glance

Day 0	**The manure arrives** Start spreading it the same day.
24 hours	**Worked in** ⚖ BY LAW At the latest, from spreading. Better within the first few hours.
10 days	**Longest in a heap** ⚖ BY LAW Only if it cannot be spread sooner, and always covered.
3–4 weeks	**Plant or sow** Any sooner and it can burn the seed.
2 months	**Harvest** ⚖ BY LAW At the earliest, from application.

How much to apply?

There is no single rate: it depends on the manure, your soil and what you grow. These figures are a **guide** for fresh laying-hen manure (around **1–1.5% nitrogen**). Adjust them with the analysis and your adviser.

CROP	PER M²	PER HECTARE
Potatoes main and winter crops	**1–1.5 kg**	**10–15 t**
Cereals wheat, barley, rye, maize	**0.5–1 kg**	**5–10 t**
Legumes broad beans, peas, lentils, chickpeas, beans	**0.3–0.5 kg**	**3–5 t**

Potatoes. A hungry crop. Add potassium if the analysis calls for it.

Cereals. Do not overdo it: too much and they grow tall, fall over and fill grain poorly.

Legumes. Little: they make their own nitrogen; the manure mainly gives them phosphorus and potassium.

⚖ Measuring without scales

1 kg/m² = 10 t/ha

One kilo per square metre is **10 tonnes per hectare**.

1 wheelbarrow = ≈ 50 kg

A **full wheelbarrow** of fresh manure weighs about 50 kg. At 1 kg/m², it covers about **50 m²**.

⚠ In a nitrate vulnerable zone

Manures may add no more than **170 kg of nitrogen per hectare per year**: with manure at 1.2% nitrogen, that is about **14 tonnes per hectare**.

Why it works

Flies

Flies lay eggs in moist manure and, in **7–10 days** (less in summer), hundreds hatch. If the manure is spread and worked in within a day or two, **the cycle is broken before it starts**.

Smell

The smell is mostly **ammonia**, escaping while the manure lies in the open. Buried, that ammonia **stays in the soil as food** for your crop.

Protect yourself

- **Gloves and an FFP2 mask** when handling it, especially if it is dry and dusty.
- **Wash your hands** before eating, drinking or smoking.
- **Clean wheels and tools** before going back on the road.

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About this guide

THE IDEA

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Granja La Cuesta is a family business in Gran Canaria that has been producing fresh eggs on its two laying-hen farms for more than 50 years.

granjalacuesta.com

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A guide, not the law. What applies is Spain's Royal Decree 1051/2022 on sustainable nutrition in agricultural soils, the Canary Islands Government's rules for nitrate vulnerable zones and your municipality's bylaws. If in doubt, ask your adviser or your island council's agricultural extension office.