

Synthetic gypsum product could improve southern Illinois soils

By NAT WILLIAMS

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MARION, Ill. — A waste product generated by a power plant soon will be used to improve soils on southern Illinois farms.

Southern Illinois Power Cooperative recently signed an agreement to sell a synthetic gypsum to a Chicago farm products distributor. The product will be sold under the brand name Gypsoil by Beneficial Reuse Management LLC.

"Farmers can actually use this to reduce the amount of anhydrous

ammonia they have to use on their fields," said Leonard Hopkins, manager of the Environmental and Fuels Department at SIPC.

"It also tends to make the soil hold water better. Of course, we test this all the time to make sure there are no other contaminants that would cause problems with the soil."

It is well-suited for areas such as southern Illinois with clay soils that drain poorly, according to Robert Spoerri of Beneficial Reuse.

"It improves the struc-

ture of the soil, making the soil more permeable so that water is retained better," he said. "It provides better drought resistance and reduces ponding in the field."

"It also reduces soil and nutrient runoff during rainstorms. It can make a substantial difference in improving the overall structure of the soil."

According to Hopkins, Gypsoil has a higher concentration of calcium sulfate than standard gypsum.

"The actual synthetic that we produce is about

95 percent, where the natural is about 85 percent, so that is even a better product," he said.

Calcium sulfate is produced during a process in which sulfur dioxide is removed from the gas emitted when coal is burned at the power plant.

Limestone is added to the sulfur dioxide to produce calcium sulfate. The power company then oxi-

dizes the matter to produce a synthetic form of gypsum.

SIPC began producing synthetic gypsum after modifying one of the power plant's scrubbers, about two years ago, Hopkins said.

In the past, calcium sulfite, a sludge-like material was the result. That was used in mine reclamation projects.

SIPC produces about 100,000 tons of the synthetic gypsum annually.

Spoerri said recommended applications of Gypsoil are 1 ton to 2 tons per acre, every year or two years. The cost of product at the shipping point is \$14 per ton. "The (end) cost depends upon where you are, since freight is a big component of the cost," he said.

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