

This column features questions from Wyoming landowners that were submitted via the Web site. To submit a question to Small Acre Sam, visit BarnyardsandBackyards.com. If your question is featured, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Barnyards and Backyards!*

ask Sam



question

Can water from a septic tank be safely used for watering a garden? If no, what about "gray" water?

Miles – Casper, WY

answer

Miles,

No. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality is the governing body over wastewater discharge and its use. It is illegal to apply untreated septic wastewater to crops. Consider that human feces carry a high load of disease-causing pathogens that can seriously affect human health. The biggest culprit is fecal coliform, which can cause serious gastrointestinal maladies. Consider, too, that other potentially harmful substances accumulate in septic waste, namely heavy metals, phosphorus, salt, grease, and nitrogen. All could become major environmental issues if applied to the soil. Lastly, consider your neighbors and the possible stench issues!

The answer to the second question is again no. Gray water is usually defined as water that has been used for clothes washing, dishwashing, and general household cleaning. Although gray water does not normally contain disease-causing pathogens or heavy metals, etc., state law forbids its use as a source for irrigation.