

Feedback on the quality of compost and digestate products

Summary results of an industry survey

A survey carried out in autumn 2016 and completed by more than two hundred people has provided for the first time an accurate picture of how users view the quality of compost and digestate products.

This summary of the survey results can:

- help product users learn from their peers to get greater value from compost and digestate
- help suppliers understand how to improve the services they provide
- help industry bodies deliver a sustainable market for digestate and compost products

The survey supports the continuous improvement in the quality of compost and digestate products and was delivered collaboratively by the organisations noted above, with the kind support of their stakeholders.

The summary of a related survey into feedstock quality is also available.

Key results - digestate

Using less bagged fertiliser was identified as the single greatest positive benefit of using digestate. This reflects well on a common understanding amongst users that digestates are a good alternative source of plant nutrients.

Encouragingly, increased yields were also identified by many respondents. Other positive experiences

were also reported, although not as commonly as the first two benefits.

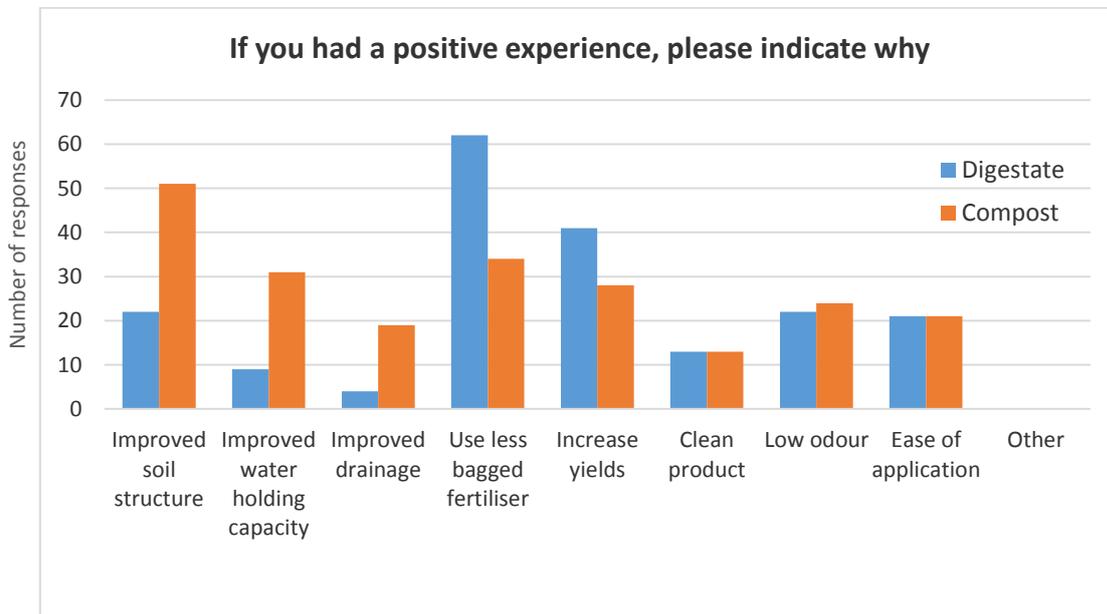
The comment from one respondent provides a useful insight to how this higher level of performance and user satisfaction can be achieved:

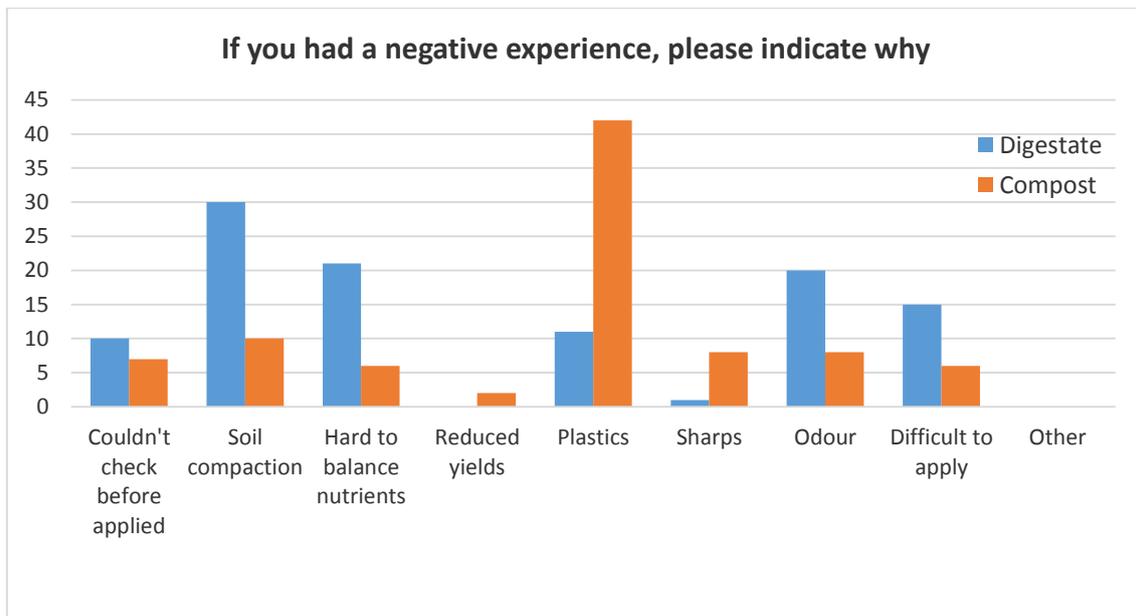
“The service included advice on including organics as part of a fertiliser plan and including soil testing as a routine practice... This is why I believe many users have seen improved performance.”

Combining soil nutrient testing with fertiliser planning is often considered the easiest way of improving the financial performance of farm businesses where this is not already routine. This also requires an up-to-date analysis of the product.

Respondents were also asked to identify negative experiences of using digestate. Perhaps surprisingly, the single biggest negative factor identified was soil compaction (see graph below). Plastic contamination was not identified as a common negative experience.

Several aspects of poor practice were also referred to in comments. These included occasional bad spells of plastics contamination, problems with odour generating complaints from neighbours and a report that *“Far greater quantities were being applied than what was ordered (suspect digestate plant were trying to get rid of product)”*.





Key results - compost

The survey confirmed that the principal reason for using compost is to improve soil structure, along with the related benefits of improving soil water holding capacity and drainage.

A number of respondents also identified the financial benefits of compost, through displaced bagged fertiliser requirements and increased yields. The cost of using compost can be more easily justified against these benefits than the difficult to quantify benefits of improved soil quality.

Although a range of negative experiences were identified, respondents clearly highlighted contamination of composts with plastic as the most common negative experience. A number of comments also reported problems with weeds.

Logistics

In relation to both compost and digestate, a number of comments were made on the cost of haulage, the space required for storage, and difficulties associated with application.

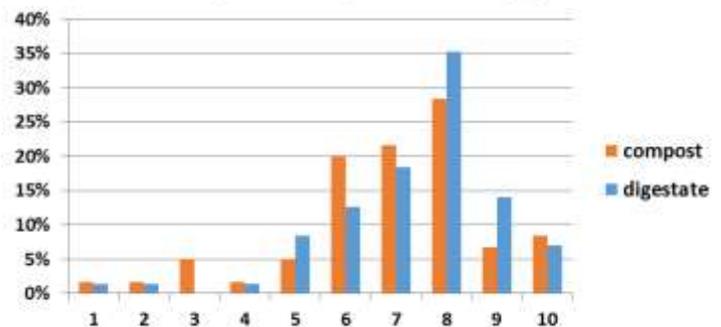
This highlights the opportunity of improving customer satisfaction through better planning between suppliers and farmers of storage, supply and application to fit better with crop management.

How well did product meet your expectations?

Although respondents provided a range of scores in response to this question, on average the scores were good for compost and digestate.

For both products, the average score was 7/10, and the most frequent score was 8/10.

How well did the product meet your expectations (1=low, 10=high)



Methodology

To generate these results, an online survey using Survey Monkey was carried out through autumn 2016. The question set and full results are available as an annex to this summary.

The survey was *not* specific to quality certified products.

There were 203 respondents, which was considered a good response. Thanks are due to colleagues and stakeholders of the above named organisations for promoting the survey.

There were 60 people responded about compost, 71 about digestate, and 72 about both products.

Respondents were typically farmers, but responses were also received from farmer advisers and some from horticultural and landscaping users.

No statistical analysis has been carried out on the results, and readers should use their own judgement to decide whether the results are representative.