

## Choosing Your Custom Lagoon Pumper

Know the Difference, Before you Make your Choice



Choices ... Decisions ... Who Should I Choose? ... Who is the Best Pumper? ...  
When are They Available? ... What is the Best Value? ... How Do I Know?

As a producer of manure and wastewater you have many options available to you for cleaning out your lagoons, settling basins, and ponds. When looking at all the alternatives and all the vendors for each alternative it is sometimes hard to know who to choose.

This article will give you some of the points of differentiation between custom lagoon pumpers and hopefully that will give you some ways to compare and decide what is the best fit for your situation.

### **Price vs. Overall Cost**

How much is this going to cost? That is usually the first question that enters everyone's mind. But the better questions should be:

- How many solids do I have in my lagoon?
- How many gallons will I need to pump out to remove these solids?
- How can I remove these solids in the most cost-effective manner?
- What am I going to do with the solids that are pumped?

You can't adequately get a quote or know the cost unless you know the answer to these questions. Your pumping contractor should be able to help you sort out these details.

Pumpers charge any number of and a combination of ways such as: • by the gallon, • by the hour, • by the dry tons removed, • by the acre, • by a total fixed quote, • by the amount of mobilization required, • by the number of field layouts needed, • by the time of the year, • by who is paying for the fuel, • by who is providing the tractors, etc.

*(See other article on website: "A Word about Price")*

Most pumpers generally charge by the gallon pumped; but not all gallons are equal. The thicker the slurry the more costly it is to pump. But the thicker you pump the solids; the less gallons are required. And not all pumpers are upfront with the number of gallons they pump and the solids they remove. *(See other article on website: "Dry Tons vs. Gallons Pumped")*

### **Experience**

Most pumpers get started by working for some other pumper. But working as a laborer is not the same as owning and managing a pumping operation. There is so much more to know that only comes from solving years' worth of situations and issues that arise. It is good to have experienced foreman, experienced owners, and experienced representatives that can help you through the process of pumping and cleaning out your lagoons.

In addition, does the pumper have a plan for agitation, field application, dealing with the unknowns, dealing with manure spills, helping find farmers to receive and cost share, etc.

### **Equipment**

Good and reliable equipment is key to satisfactorily completing any job. While new equipment can have breakdowns, older equipment will have breakdowns more frequently. Good and reliable equipment is one thing; but are the employees properly trained to operate the equipment in the proper and safe manner.

In addition to having newer equipment, is having the right kind of equipment and the right amount of equipment. This would include having newer hoses for less problems; enough hoses to reach the fields you want to pump to; the proper agitation equipment (*boats and stick agitators*); having proper flow meters that can be trusted, large enough pumps to handle the thicker solids; hose humpers to work around field obstructions;

Having good equipment, maintaining this equipment and having it ready to use on your lagoon takes a tremendous amount of capital. This is not possible unless a fair price is being charged. Some pumpers get started by undercutting the established pumpers; but sooner or later they will have to establish fair pricing or end up with dilapidated and dysfunctional equipment; you can't have it both ways.

### **Availability**

Every lagoon owner or producer has a window of opportunity when they desire to have their lagoons pumped. This is generally before planting, after harvest, or on fallow ground. The timing of this will depend on what part of the country your operation is in. Southern states have earlier planting and harvesting schedules.

Most pumpers are extremely busy during the pre-season and after-harvest times. To get the pumping dates you want, you will have to make a pumping commitment early. Most pumpers will be in your area one or two times a year. To save on mobilization fees, it is best to pump during these time frames.

Pumping during the summer crop growing months will usually get you a pumping discount. If you are chopping corn, wheat or oats for silage you generally can get into these discounted time frames. If you are taking your crops to grain you will end up needing to pump during the busier time of the year.

### **Reliability**

Is the pumper you are considering a reliable company? Will they do what you want and expect? Is the representative on time for his appointments? Do they communicate with you? Can you count on them to be there when you need them? Are they pumping the amount of solids you expect within the gallons you are expecting?

Having a vendor who treats you fairly and can be counted on to do the job you expect is important. This starts with properly communicating your needs to the company representative. Having these needs documented on a field map so this can be passed onto the pumpers. Then having a pre-pump meeting with the foreman so all your needs are properly known.

There is nothing more embarrassing if the pumper puts the wrong amount of manure slurry on the wrong fields; or pumps out of the wrong lagoon.

Communication, and verification is key. Lagoon Pumping & Dredging strives to make this as seamless and efficient as possible.

### **Integrity and Reputation**

*"Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me,"* this old saying is very true. You do not want any surprises when it comes to getting your lagoon cleaned, getting your invoice and paying for the job that you expected. Is the pumping company a entity of their word? Will they do what they say? Will they stand behind their work?

This works for both the producer and the pumper. You need to get the agreement in writing. You need a quote! You need to have your expectations clearly defined! You need to know the answers before the pumping begins!

The biggest issues on any pumping job and with any pumper is adequate understanding of the total gallons to be pumped, the target percent solids you want the slurry removed at, and the expected budget for pumping. As a producer you need to have a *"Not to Exceed"* budget understanding. No one want a surprise when it comes to the bill.

Any question or issues about gallons to pump, gallons per acre application rates, prices for pumping to the various fields, target percent of solids to pump at, fields to be applied to, and total pumping budget needs to be discussed and determined prior to pumping. Sorting out any differences after the fact leads to mistrust and hard feelings.

A good pumper welcomes the questions, welcomes the scrutiny during our pumping, and above all values any question you have on your bill. Everyone needs to be upfront with each other and to communicate their expectations.

Lagoon Pumping & Dredging, Inc. wants to know what your limitations are:

- Do they pump until the lagoon is empty?
- Do they pump until all the fields are land applied?
- Do they pump to a *"Not to Exceed"* budget expectation?
- Are there any not to exceed application rates on the fields?
- Are there any areas that the tractors must not go over or stay away from?

If there are any changes to the agreed upon expectations, such as application rates, fields to apply on, changes in your budget limitations ... it **MUST** be in writing. A text or email works great. This way, there is a clear understanding and documentation of your expectations.

### **Value Added**

Some things are easy to measure such as gallons pumped, and price paid. But there are other tangibles that are harder to measure such as:

- Visiting your neighboring farmers and getting them to cost share,
- Providing good application maps prior to pumping,
- Taking samples of the slurry applied to each field,
- Certified lab reports of these slurry samples,

- Cleaning up after the job is done,
- Following up after the bill is paid,
- Showing appreciation for your business,
- Keeping in touch after your job is done.

A good pumper does not just want a job to pump, but they want to earn and keep your trust, respect and friendship for life. Nothing speaks louder than a satisfied customer. No advertising works better than a customer referral.

### **Personalities**

Yes, personalities do make a difference. There are people who will rub you the wrong way. While they may be a good pumper, the frustration of working with them is not worth the price.

A good pumping company will have people friendly individuals who are the liaison between you and the pumping crew. This is generally the sales or customer representative who can answer your questions, provide you with solutions, and find the ways to make things happen with their company.

The crew foreman is a good resource for the feet-on-the-ground, day-to-day pumping decisions. But the foreman is generally task orientated and probably does not have the ability to get around company policies, solve the bigger issues and the business concerns.

### **Research the Options**

You owe it to yourself and your company to do your due diligence in finding the best pumping company for your lagoon pumping needs.

A good resource is asking other producers who they use as a pumper, asking them if they are satisfied with their pumper, asking your crop advisor or agronomist for recommendations, asking the DEQ or regulatory agency for a list of vendors, doing an internet search for the pumping company's background, looking at the information on the company's web site, and getting straight answers from the company's sales representative.

Every pumping company feels they are the best; but are they the best choice for you? You are the ultimate decider and as the person who writes the check it is up to you who you choose and for the reasons you decide.

We hope that Lagoon Pumping & Dredging can help you in your quest to find the solution to your lagoon solids and pumping needs. We want to be your "go-to" vendor when an answer or solution is needed. We are a transparent company who has Christian values and who values our reputation and integrity. We are a company who is willing to comply with all your requests and strives to meet and exceed your expectations.

We don't want just another job to pump, we want to earn and keep you as a customer for life. Lagoon Pumping & Dredging is a company who values our relationship with our customers. We will treat you the same as we would want to be treated. We treat everyone fairly with respect and dignity. We want to include you in our Lagoon Pumping & Dredging family. *Can we count on your business?*