

Whole Cycle Tuesday

Key Takeaway

Beneficial use is not defined by where a material goes — but by what it accomplishes. When intent, processing, and outcomes align, beneficial use becomes a legitimate environmental management tool rather than an alternative form of disposal.

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"The environment is where we all meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share." — Lady Bird Johnson

Beneficial Use ≠ Waste Disposal

The term beneficial use is often applied broadly to land application of organic residuals. However, beneficial use should not be defined solely by regulatory eligibility or diversion from disposal. At its core, beneficial use is determined by intent, processing, and measurable outcome. Materials that are merely relocated, even when permitted, do not automatically constitute beneficial use.

Defining Beneficial Use

From a regulatory standpoint, beneficial use requires that a material serve a demonstrable functional purpose beyond disposal. Legitimate beneficial use products are designed to:

- Improve soil physical structure and resilience
- Support biological activity and organic matter cycling
- Manage nutrients at agronomic rates
- Improve water infiltration, retention, or erosion control
- Reduce environmental risk when properly applied

If these outcomes cannot be reasonably demonstrated, the application functions as disposal, regardless of compliance

Performance Over Feedstock Origin

Beneficial use is often evaluated by material origin rather than end-use performance. In practice, functional performance is the more relevant metric.

- Reduces the likelihood of complaints or misapplication
- Improves environmental protection outcomes
- Supports clearer compliance expectations
- Builds public confidence in land application programs

Products engineered for specific use cases behave more predictably than materials managed as waste streams.

Measuring Success by Outcomes

Regulations appropriately establish minimum safeguards. However, beneficial use programs are most effective when success is evaluated by outcomes, including:

- Soil health improvements
- Reduced runoff or nutrient loss
- Stable biological activity
- Long-term site performance

