A NO THER example of "in-barn" low rate composting—similar in some respects to the poultry litter system in Ohio has emerged in the last five years, with thousands of new structures built with plastic-covered "hoops" for a roof and bedding on the floor. Hoop structures are becoming commonplace in the Midwest and western Canada. This idea is attractive in part because of the low capital cost, but also because of perceived advantages with respect to odors, water quality, animal welfare, and worker comfort.

IN-BARN COMPOSTING SYSTEM PLUS A WARM BED FOR PIGS

A product coming out of the barns is not stable compost and it is not being marketed that way. However, it is not fresh manure either. Harry Hoitink, a professor of plant pathology at Ohio State University, is very familiar with the litter management process used at this Ohio chicken farm. "The key point of the article is that it is a better management practice than putting new sawdust in the barn each time," says Hoitink. "It is not by any means a mature compost. If you wanted to have a compost or pellet, the material would have to be treated for about another six weeks. BioCycle readers may have been misled to think that the material after five to seven cycles is a stabilized compost but instead, it is applied to the farm's cropland as a product right out of the barn."

In summary, Dr. Brodie makes an important point—poultry litter should not be considered finished compost just because the litter goes through several cycles and experiences some decomposition. Nevertheless, advanced decomposition does take place and the end product suits the end use. If mature compost is ever required, the litter will have gotten a good start in the barn. Furthermore, the multiple cycle litter management system is serving the Ohio poultry operation well in regard to bird health and production costs.

- N.G.