Outside wintering lots for dairy heifers, young stock and steers will accumulate valuable manure nutrients. Recycling those nutrients into your crops and pastures is like money in the bank and will lessen your risk of runoff when spring arrives.

The very nature of outside lots implies that the livestock will congregate—and defecate—in one area, as well as generally destroying vegetation and compacting soil. Melting snow and spring rains can potentially wash an entire winter’s worth of nutrients off site. A determined manager can capture these nutrients for crop production.

Right to Farm (RTF) guidelines dictate that runoff containing manure nutrients is not to leave the owner’s property and should never reach surface waters. Properly locating a winter-
lands before a spring thaw. Keep this area as small as possible to reduce soil compaction and loss of vegetation.

Let’s consider 40 750 lb heifers on a lot for 180 days. They can generate enough potassium to fertilize 25 acres with the equivalent of 60 pounds of K₂O per acre. That’s more than $1,000 worth of fertilizer. These young stock will generate less phosphorus than a milking herd but will generate close to $500 worth of phosphorus. Although some of the nitrogen will volatilize, cold weather reduces losses, so there is potentially $1,000 worth of this nutrient that can be utilized elsewhere.

The three nutrients add up quickly at 2008 fall prices.