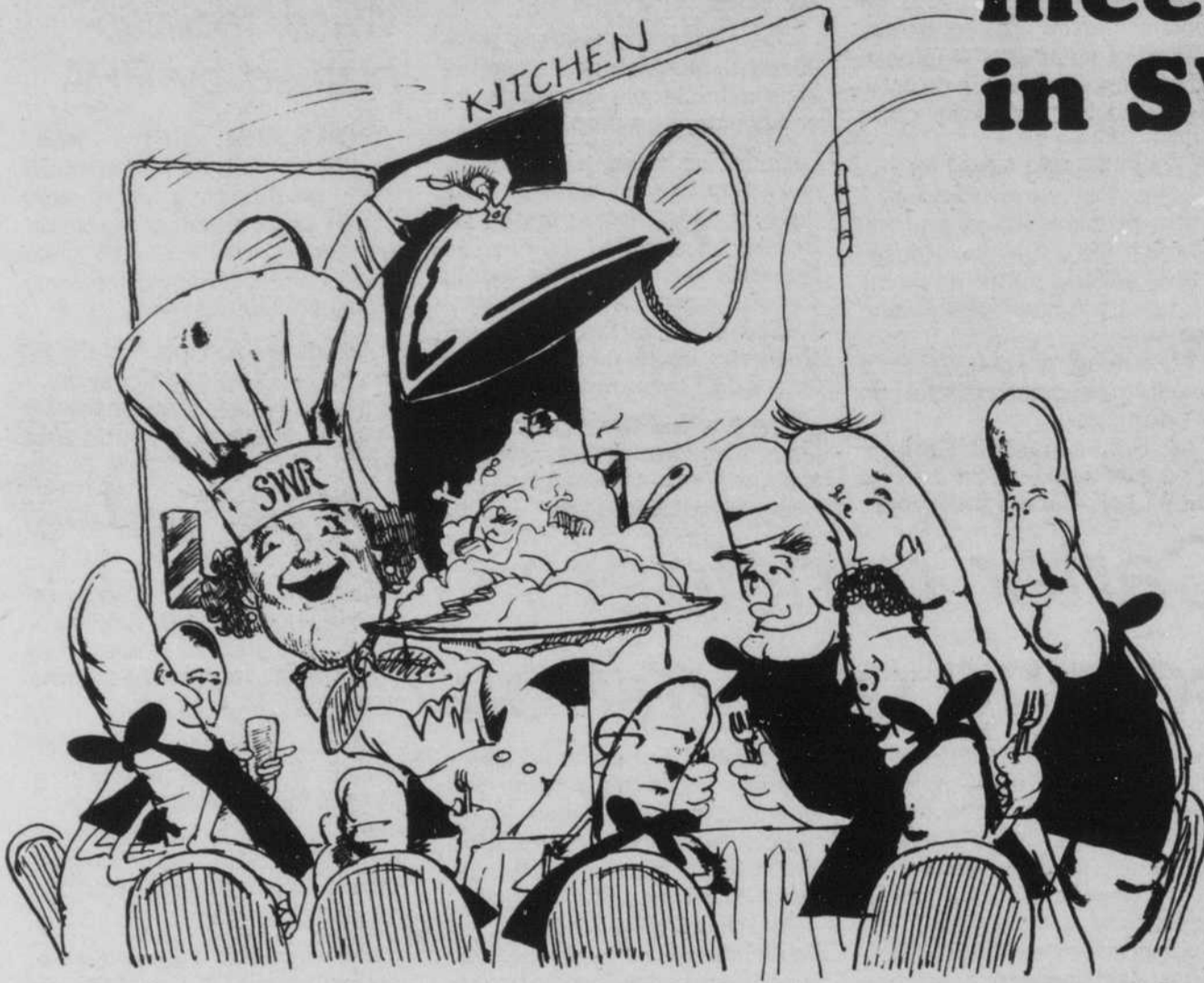


# Worms

# Organic waste meets its fate in SWR's hands



Drawing by Jim Payne

By KATY SLADE  
Of the Emerald

In a novel effort to reduce ever-growing mountains of sewer waste, which producers are no longer able to dump indiscriminately, Solid Wastes Resources, Ltd. (SWR) of Eugene has broken ground at its first sludge processing facility.

SWR plans to cart sludge away from municipalities and industries (for a fee), process the bad elements out of it, put in some good ones, bag it up and sell it as organic fertilizer.

Profit is possible at both ends if it works.

And success, if it is reached, will be due in part to the humble, tireless efforts of the processing workers SWR will employ in its facility.

Red wigglers.

The average red wiggler (who has a life expectancy of 10-15 years and does not drink, smoke or loaf) can consume up to its own body weight daily in organic matter.

The red wiggler excretes this matter in the form of castings rich in minerals, and SWR says use of worm castings in fertilizing can mean as much as a 40 percent increase in crop yield.

Bruce Eder, director of marketing for SWR, tells how SWR hit upon the idea of earthworm-recycling:

"The idea was sparked by an incident involving Bob Desler (now SWR president) and Rich Reiling (who owns a sewer service company).

"They were installing a new septic tank and in opening the old one they saw a lot of worms...Mr. Reiling asked if enough worms could clean up the area.

"So they took a 300-foot area, dumped 300 pounds of worms and 2,200 gallons of sewage on it — and the worms ate it all in 10 days."

After that, Eder says, they began research to determine what kinds of worms and what kinds of waste were best. While they were researching, they discovered that a company in Japan already had developed a system involving earthworm recycling, and had been operating plants for more than three years.

"We decided the best thing was to import the technology and make it available to private investors and municipalities," Eder says.

So SWR contracted with Aoka Sangyo Co., Ltd., for exclusive rights to the technology in North and South America, plus one-half joint venture involvement in all other countries except Japan.

SWR claims their earthworm recycling system is the only solution to the problem of sludge disposal.

posal.

With the advent of strict air and water quality standards, the only solution available now is landfill. It, however, requires excess land to dump sludge on, which many cities and industrial areas do not have.

Dumping sludge into lakes, rivers and oceans is quickly becoming a scene from the past and burning sludge is not only costly but causes air pollution.

Some facets of the earthworm-recycling system of SWR are trade secrets, but it has been learned that the sludge facilities will take the sludge, treat it to remove certain chemicals and send it through a "non-odorous stability" process. Then they will show it to the worms, who presumably make a mad dash for it.

It takes the 84,000 wigglers about 32 days to process a batch of sludge. Then somehow, the worms are mysteriously separated from their bodily waste, hustled off to a new load of sludge and told to get busy.

Meanwhile, the castings are packaged and go off to the market. Eder says the castings will be marketed in three ways: used as a mixture with potting soil, as an organic soil conditioner and with chemicals as fertilizer.

He says the second product will be useful only to farmers committed to organic gardening because automated farms are committed to their machinery and present equipment cannot spread the castings.

Eder thinks it's a shame, but says, "it has to be demonstrated to them that (castings) are good for them on a profit basis — that's what we are trying to do."

As for the third product made from the castings, Eder says, "We mix it with chemicals because the farmer thinks he needs chemicals."

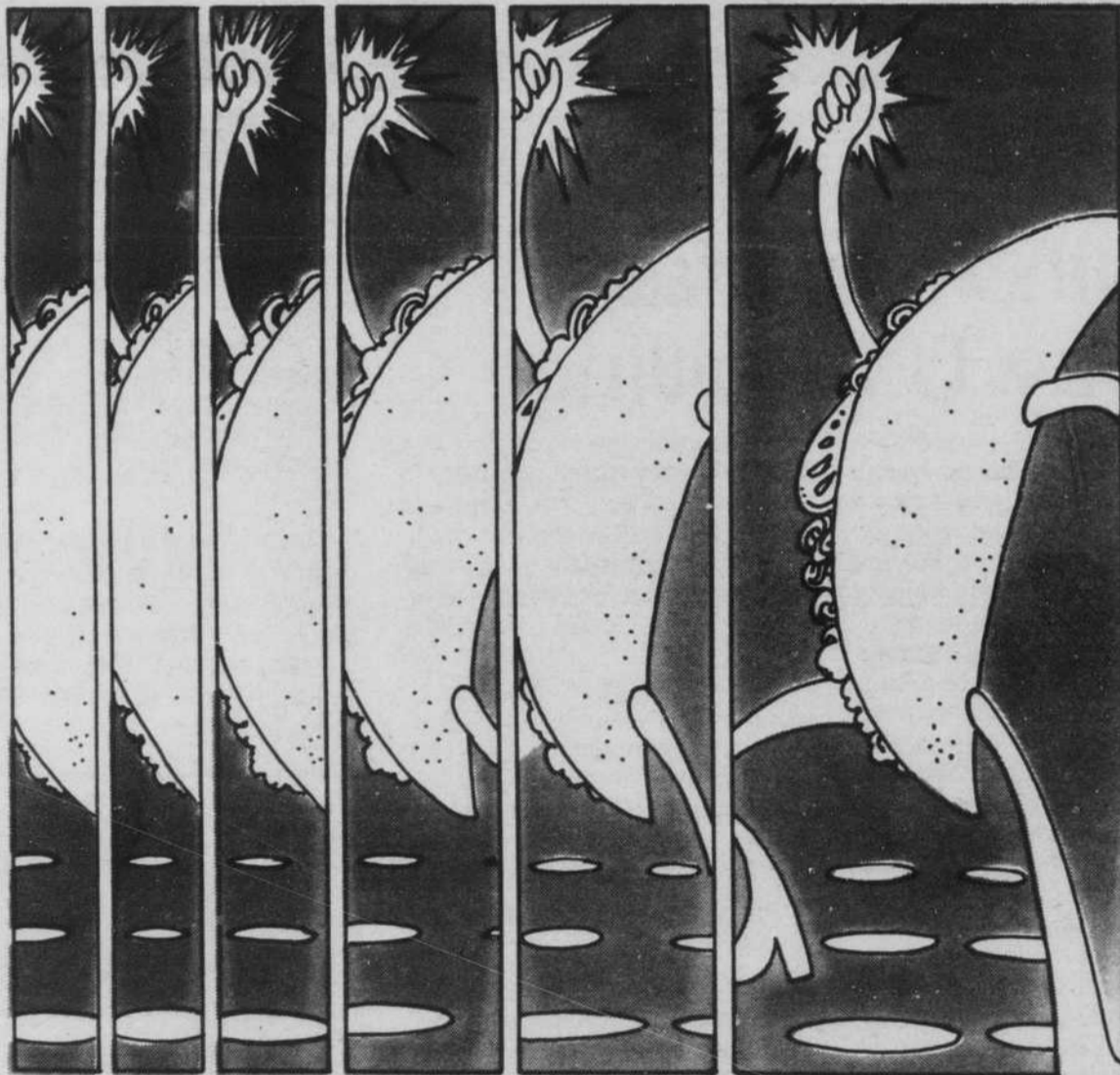
"The more chemicals put on the land, the less possible it is for worms to live there. Without worms, you cannot regenerate humus — the foundation of topsoil. Without humus, the land dries up and blows away."

At any rate, SWR believes their product is badly needed in light of the growing scarcity of petroleum-based fertilizers.

Eder admits worms cannot recycle every kind of waste, but he says they can consume anything organic, such as livestock wastes, paper mill wastes and brewery and cannery wastes.

He also says SWR's technology allows for a certain level of inorganic chemical and metal in the sludge, although wastes with too high a level of toxic substances would be inadmissible. Worm deaths on a massive scale would result.

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