Mussel Mud Did you know

The name mussel mud was incorrectly coined because the early settlers assumed the main ingredient was mussel shells. In fact the most abundant material in the mud is oyster shells.

Unlike other fertilizers, the effects of mussel mud on a field can last for decades. It takes many years for the oyster shells to break down which provides a valuable source of lime to the field as the shells gradually decompose.

Mussel mud diggers were often more then 20 feet long and nearly 10 feet wide. Because of the sheer size of the machines they would be disassembled each year and the parts were piled on the shore until they were reconstructed the following winter after ice formed on the water.

Providing the power for the mud diggers was extremely hard on the horses. Many times the horses would fall to the ice with exhaustion. When this happened, the horse would be laid on a sleigh and returned to the barn to rest until they were able to work again.

For more than a 100 years mussel mud was the main fertilizer on Island farms.
Modern attempts at digging mussel mud used tractors to power the diggers.

The practice of digging mussel mud was so common that many community museums on PEI now have portions mud diggers in their collections. There is a reconstructed full-scale mud digger that was reconstructed at Kier Memorial Museum in Malpeque, PEI.

The potato industry largely shunned mussel mud as a fertilizer because the first few years it was in contact with the crops it caused the potatoes to scab.

Many farmers shoveled nearly 40 sleigh loads of mud per acre onto their farms. It took nearly six fork fulls from the digger to fill each sleigh, so in some cases there were 240 fork fulls of mussel mud spread on each acre of a farm.