PINPOINT
Rivers Trusts and Farmers tackling water pollution

Association of Rivers Trusts
where there's water there's life

A clear solution for farmers
ENGLAND CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING DELIVERY INITIATIVE

Farm advice on reducing diffuse water pollution from agriculture, delivered in partnership between Defra, The Environment Agency and Natural England

Best Practice Information Sheet

Managing livestock areas

Sheet 35.0a

Introduction

Why change?

Good management of livestock areas can help you to save time and money, and protect the environment. By reviewing your management of livestock tracks, feeding and drinking areas, sacrifice areas and outdoor pigs, you can benefit from:

- improved soil structure
- reduced risk of soil erosion, runoff and watercourse pollution
- improved stock health and productivity, and lower vet bills
- improved grass production
- reduced costs of re-seeding.

Wet and damaged livestock areas are costly

Steps to success

1. **Review the current situation** by examining the management of livestock areas on your farm. Consider factors such as your soil type, condition and erosion risk, stocking densities, grazing pattern, stock health, and provision of stock access, feeding and drinking areas, weather patterns, livestock types, and available and management requirements on designated land (e.g. SSSI) or land under agreement (e.g. Environmental Stewardships).

2. **Check Cross Compliance Regulations GAEC 9** which states that no overgrazing or unsuitable supplementary feeding should take place on natural or semi-natural grassland. Semi-natural vegetation is defined as 'self-seeded or self propagated vegetation characteristic of the area'.

3. **Identify potential opportunities** for improving management of livestock areas to protect your soils. Look out for soils damaged by poaching or vehicle movements, brown water runoff or watercourse pollution.

4. **Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities** by considering costs of improved management such as new stock trails, mobile feeders, drinkers and winter housing, versus the cost of problems including stock lameness and injury, soil erosion and runoff, watercourse pollution and reduced habitat quality. Investigate funding available for management under Environmental Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes to help make management changes such as lower stocking rates, mixed stocking or for capital items such as fencing and gates.

5. **Develop an action plan** for improved management of livestock areas:
   - **prioritise** fields with wet, heavy, erosion-prone soils. Aim to protect habitats such as watercourses and woodlands. Remember that the need for soil protection is greatest on bare soils during the winter
   - **consider reducing the impact of livestock on your soils**. For example, select drier fields for winter grazing, remove livestock from vulnerable land in wet periods, reduce stocking densities, site water troughs and feeding areas away from ditches and watercourses, manage farm tracks to avoid runoff, and protect river banks from uncontrolled access by livestock
   - **manage your livestock tracks** to avoid runoff and stock health problems, and improve stock control and timeliness of movements (see, IS 36).
   - **manage your feeding and drinking areas** to avoid poaching and stock health problems (see, IS 37). **consider using sacrifice areas** if poaching and runoff persist (see, IS 38).
   - **outdoor pigs** present specific management issues (see, IS 39). Aim to maximise grass cover and minimise soil damage. Avoid sites with a high erosion risk.

6. **Check** your fields regularly particularly during wet weather, e.g. for signs of poaching, soil compaction, soil erosion and brown water runoff, to maximise the potential for early management of problems and to minimise costs and risk of prosecution.

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Practical examples

Lameness and injury
An over-wintering site for 100 beef cattle, which had mobile feeders and drinkers, was moved from land prone to poach to an area of free draining land.

As well as using a better-drained area, two drinkers with hardened bases were constructed while the land was dry. These two cost a total of £600.

The site gave a 5% reduction in lameness/injury giving an estimated saving of £3/animal; a total of £300.

The site and improved feeding equipment reduced feed wastage by 5% (mainly from less trampled mud) giving a saving of £2.50/ animal; a total of £250.

Reduced costs from better out-wintering were £600 and the payback was one year.

Soils and crops
Careful management of out-wintered stock and equipment in order to avoid serious damage to soils and sward was undertaken on 5 ha of grassland. Regular inspections, particularly in wet weather allowed movement to better-drained areas before serious poaching occurred. This resulted in 10% less grass to be restored, encouraged early recovery and provided an early spring "bite".

Careful management and preparation of the over-wintering site and monitoring poaching, as part of routine inspections, was cost neutral.

Annual savings included 10% less reseeding of grass @ £54/ha, and 10% less loss of forage@ £24/ha. The total saving for 5 ha was £390 with an immediate payback.

Serious poaching frequently occurs around feeders

Drinkers sited inappropriately can lead to stock standing in water

Remember

- Good livestock management can save you time and money, and protect the environment.
- Check your land regularly for signs of poaching and brown water runoff, particularly during wet weather. Consider simple changes to livestock management if hoof marks from cattle are deeper than 50mm.
- If poaching persists despite the implementation of best farming practices, consider the cost-benefit of adapting existing buildings or using new low-cost options such as polytunnels for housing livestock during wet periods.

For further information: Defra (www.defra.gov.uk), Environment Agency (www.environment-agency.gov.uk), ECSFDI (http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/water/csf/delivery-initiative.htm), Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk), Cross Compliance Helpline 0845 345 1302 (www.crosscompliance.org.uk) and ART (www.associationofriverstrusts.org.uk)

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This information sheet is part of a series providing farmers with advice on land management practices to protect water bodies, produced by Association of Rivers Trusts with support from the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative. The advice will also enable farmers to use farm resources more efficiently and help meet Nitrate Vulnerable Zone and Soil Protection Review requirements under Cross Compliance and environmental regulation.

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