

Best Practice Information Sheet

Managing livestock areas

Sheet 36.0a

Livestock tracks

Why change?

Effective positioning, construction and maintenance of animal tracks can help to increase control and timeliness over livestock movements and grazing. By reviewing your management of livestock tracks, you can save money and reduce the risk of:

- poaching and soil erosion
- runoff and watercourse pollution
- stock lameness and injury
- damage to productive land and wildlife habitats.
- contamination of water supplies



Well planned and maintained livestock tracks are an asset to the farm

Steps to success

1. **Review the current situation** by examining the provision for livestock access on your farm. Begin by considering the type and condition of your soils, health of your stock, efficiency of your stock movements and the nature and quality of farm tracks between key areas.
2. **Identify potential opportunities** for improving livestock tracks to protect the soils and stock on your farm. If tracks are muddy, slippery and stony, improved access could help you to reduce problems such as runoff, poor foot health and slow stock movement. Look out for poaching, brown water runoff, sharp stones and contamination by manures around feeding and gathering areas, and on existing stock trails. Check stock regularly for signs of lameness.
3. **Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities** by considering the benefits of improving your farm tracks versus the cost of problems such as stock lameness, soil erosion and watercourse pollution.
4. **Prioritise** fields with wet, heavy, erosion-prone soils and steep slopes. First address areas around gateways, and near watercourses and ditches.
5. **Develop an action plan** for improved management stock access using livestock tracks:
 - consider the existing pattern of stock trails on your farm. Identify the main areas that you would like to link together, as well as where provision of additional trails is required to enable timely access. Remember to remove the area of new tracks from your Single Payment Scheme (SPS) claim.
 - avoid constructing new routes where runoff to watercourses and ditches could occur. Relocate existing routes that impact on watercourses, and re-site farm gates to avoid runoff pathways
 - if routes cross watercourses, aim to prevent the impact of poaching and dunging by providing a bridge if possible
 - improve existing trails or construct new ones using stable track surfaces such as well-drained bark, aggregate or hard core, or concrete
 - provide wider areas at the end of tracks to allow easy access
 - maintain trails to keep them clear of overhanging growth and weeds
 - plan grazing management carefully to spread the impact on your tracks and minimise the potential for poaching
 - divert runoff from tracks to rough ground or blind ditches where it can be intercepted and filtered
 - use cross drains on tracks to reduce runoff and erosion.
6. **Check** tracks regularly particularly during wet weather, e.g. for signs of poaching and brown water runoff, to maximise the potential for early management of problems and to minimise costs.

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Livestock tracks - Practical examples

Stream crossings and access

In this example, a crossing point on of a small stream was replaced with a simple bridge. Fences were constructed to exclude 100 dairy cows from steep stony banks and the watercourse.

It required £300 to stabilise the watercourse banks and extend fences, and £600 to provide a simple bridge.

The reduced costs of lameness, injury and more rapid collection times due to the improved crossings were estimated to be £5/cow, giving a total of £500.

There were other uncostered benefits, which included reduced costs of treating disease and reduced pollution risk (and therefore reduced risk of prosecution).

The payback was less than two years.

Narrow cow tracks

In this example, 600m of track 1.2m wide, with an aggregate base, was constructed to improve the link from pasture to the gathering area for a herd of 100 cows and followers. The animals quickly gave preference to the surfaced track and benefited from reduced injury and infection.

The cost of 600m of track @ £22/m was £13,200 or £1,320/year of its 10 year life.

The reduced annual cost of lameness was assessed at £4/cow = £400, plus 25 minutes per day less udder cleaning time = £3650, and an average of £5.20/cow in reduced mastitis = £520. The total annual saving was £4570.

The payback on cow tracks can be less than four years.



Bridges provide safe and dry crossing points, payback often less that 2 years



Stable, dry access tracks save money

Remember

- Improved management of livestock access using carefully sited, constructed and managed farm tracks can help to improve timeliness of movements and stock health. They also reduce the risk of soil damage and loss, runoff and watercourse pollution.
- If soil erosion and runoff from your farm causes water pollution you could be liable to prosecution and consequential costs and fines.

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.associationofrivertrusts.org.uk)



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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