

Best Practice Information Sheet

Managing livestock areas

Sheet 38.0a

Sacrifice areas

Why change?

If out-wintering of stock is unavoidable, good management of a carefully selected sacrifice field can help you to ensure animal welfare, save time and money by:

- ensuring good stock conditions
- limiting soil and vegetation damage to a smaller area
- reducing the risk of soil erosion, runoff and watercourse pollution
- reducing stock welfare problems
- reducing the costs of re-seeding
- protecting wildlife habitats.



Land like this could be sacrificed during winter to save money

Steps to success

- 1. Review the current situation** by examining the management of out-wintered stock on your farm. In your assessment consider factors such soil type, condition and erosion risk, site suitability, stocking densities, stock health, environmental impacts and the potential for the provision of housing. Check if land is designated or under agreement.
- 2. Check Cross Compliance Regulations GAEC 9** which states that no overgrazing and unsuitable supplementary feeding should take place on natural or semi-natural grassland. Natural or semi-natural vegetation is defined as 'self-seeded or self propagated vegetation characteristic of the area'.
- 3. Identify potential opportunities** for out-wintering stock on sacrifice fields to protect the soils on your farm. Be aware of problems such as damaged soils, brown water runoff, watercourse pollution and stock welfare concerns, and consider whether the use of a sacrifice field could be part of a solution. **Prioritise** fields with wet, heavy and erosion-prone soils. Aim to protect habitats such as watercourses and woodlands.
- 4. Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities** by considering the benefits of implementing livestock sacrifice areas versus the cost of problems such as stock lameness, injury and waterborne disease, soil damage and erosion, watercourse pollution, and reduced habitat quality. Consider funding options for removing wintering livestock from land under Environmental Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes
- 5. Develop an action plan** for successful use of livestock sacrifice areas:
 - identify opportunities for improved management of out-wintered stock on your farm
 - take steps to reduce the impact of livestock on your soils by using good farming practices e.g. select drier fields for inter grazing, remove livestock from vulnerable land in wet periods and reduce stocking densities
 - if soil damage and stock welfare problems persist, consider selecting a sacrifice field to restrict the long-term effects on stock, land and the environment to a specific area
 - select the site for your sacrifice area carefully. Choose drier, level fields under permanent pasture with dense grass cover for maximum soil protection. Avoid locations near watercourses and ensure runoff cannot enter watercourses either directly or via ditches. Use grass strips to trap runoff and sediment where necessary
 - site multiple feeders and drinkers in well-drained areas away from watercourses, ditches and gateways. Provide hard bases to limit poaching
 - restore the damaged soil in the sacrifice area in the spring. Options include slot seeding, ploughing and re-seeding, using a suitable rotational crop, and a specialist harrow
 - use fencing to control stock access to trees and woodlands.
- 6. Check** your sacrifice areas regularly for signs of runoff, particularly during rainfall, to manage problems early and minimise costs.

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Sheet 38.0b

Sacrifice areas - Practical examples

Sacrifice areas

A well designed sacrifice field will protect the rest of the farm from environmental degradation.

The area should be sited away from a watercourse, and have a grass buffer strip (protected by electric fence or similar) around it to protect from manure run-off and soil loss.

The area should be regularly monitored and stock moved off the field in particularly wet weather. Consider the use of a hard base.



Poorly selected sacrifice areas can increase costs by injuring stock, damaging soils and crops and causing water pollution

Remember

- If soil damage associated with out-wintered stock is unavoidable, e.g. due to wet, heavy soils and the absence of suitable housing, restrict the impact on the stock, land and the environment by using carefully selected sacrifice fields.
- In the longer term, consider the cost-benefit of adapting existing buildings or using new low-cost options such as polytunnels for housing livestock in 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.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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