

Best Practice Information Sheet

Infrastructure management

Sheet 12.0a

Farm Access

Why change?

Infrastructure management is vital for all farmers. Higher productivity has increased the pressure on farm tracks, fences, gates and roadways. Ensuring good infrastructure and efficient, safe, timely movement of both machinery and stock will help to:

- protect animal health
- reduce transport and land application costs
- protect productive land and improve timeliness of access
- protect water sources from pollution



Access tracks are sources of diffuse pollution

Steps to success

- 1. Review the current situation** by using your farm map to consider existing and any potential improvements to your access needs, e.g. for extending the grazing season. Identify the causes and potential remedies of any problems you identify.
- 2. Identify potential opportunities** such as:
 - extending safe, timely access for all operations
 - draining tracks well
 - diverting track runoff away from watercourses and dirty water systems in the farm yard, to rough grass buffer strips designed to settle solids
 - making tracks suitable for stock or providing trails alongside existing routes
 - maintaining routes, especially on steeper gradients and through gateways (resite gateways to divert field runoff pathways to buffer strips)
 - minimising damage to land and crops.
- 3. Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities** by comparing the savings with the costs of labour, energy and materials necessary to improve or maintain farm tracks and gates. Identify the payback period, and remember to take a long-term view of the benefits.
- 4. Prioritise** the opportunities you have identified taking account of safety, animal health and environmental issues such as reducing the risk of water pollution.
- 5. Develop an action plan** that takes account of these priorities, as well as the availability of labour, funds and other planned farm work, in order to decide when it is best to carry out the improvements.
- 6. Implement the action plan** taking care to ensure that runoff from the work areas is diverted away from watercourses, preferably to settle solids in rough grass. It is a requirement of cross compliance that every farm in receipt of Single Payment Scheme (SPS) payments must complete a Soil Protection Review.
- 7. Monitor progress** by making inspection of the farm tracks, erosion and runoff a routine part of your farm operations.

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Farm Access - Practical examples

Narrow cow tracks

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.

Self help track

In this actual example a farmer built a new 700m track to simplify grazing management for his high margin/litre herd thereby providing access to a 16 ha (40-acre) block, including a reseeded area.

The track was constructed using 2500 tonnes of blue-grey subsoil and stones excavated on-farm at a cost of £10/tonne = £25,000. It replaced a bark on membrane track considered to have much higher maintenance costs.

The material was laid on the surface (during dry conditions) in a 3m (10ft) wide, high camber track.

The cost, including fencing and troughs (= £2,000), totalled £1687/ha with 20 year depreciation.



Aim for rapid, safe, cost-effective access

Remember

- Significant cost savings, improved timeliness and efficiency of operations result from good access.
- Design any new farm access to ensure that rainwater runoff drains to rough grass or a similar area.
- Keep your access roads clean to avoid runoff which adds to your dirty water management costs and increases the risk of water pollution.

For further information: Defra (www.defra.gov.uk), CSF (www.gov.uk/catchment-sensitive-farming), Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk/csf), Environment Agency (www.environment-agency.gov.uk), Cross Compliance Helpline 0845 345 1302 (www.crosscompliance.org.uk) and The Rivers Trust (www.riverstrust.org)



A clear solution for farmers
CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING

This information sheet is part of a series providing farmers with advice on land management practices to protect water bodies, produced by The Rivers Trust with support from Catchment Sensitive Farming. 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.



Based on Information Sheets originally created by the Westcountry Rivers Trust (www.wrt.org.uk) and developed with EAGGF objective one funding and published under permission by DEFRA and RT