PINPOINT
Rivers Trusts and Farmers tackling water pollution

A clear solution for farmers
CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING

A joint project between the Environment Agency and Natural England, funded by Defra and the Rural Development Programme for England, working in priority catchments within England.

Best Practice Information Sheet

Managing livestock areas

Sheet 37.0a

Feeding and drinking areas

Why change?

Poaching around feeding and drinking areas can lead to soil damage, as well as stock welfare and pollution problems, particularly during wet periods. Simple management changes can help you to benefit from:

- improved stock health and lower vet bills
- reduced soil damage, erosion, runoff and watercourse pollution
- improved grass production and nutritional value
- reduced sward restoration costs.
- reduced risk of damage to environmentally sensitive areas in breach of cross compliance rules

Feeding and drinking areas can quickly become severely poached

Steps to success

1. **Review the current situation** by examining the management of livestock feeding and drinking areas on your farm and assess soil and grassland damage in livestock drinking/feeding areas. Remember to consider factors such as soil type, condition and erosion risk, stocking densities, the number and location of feeders and drinkers, and vehicle access to feeding and drinking sites.

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 improved management of feeding and drinking areas to protect the soils on your farm. Look out for poaching and brown water runoff around feeders and drinkers.

4. **Prioritise** fields with wet, heavy, erosion-prone soils that are adjacent to watercourses or ditches for remedial action and operational changes

5. **Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities** by considering the benefits of improved management of feeders and drinkers versus the cost of problems such as stock lameness, soil erosion, watercourse pollution, reduced grass production, poor access and increased costs of sward restoration.

6. **Develop an action plan** for improved management of feeding and drinking areas:
   - know your soils and avoid livestock grazing during wet periods in vulnerable locations
   - maintain field drainage to keep soils reasonably dry
   - use mobile feeders and move them regularly to limit poaching and contamination of feed with soil, space them out to spread the impact, provide hard bases to limit poaching
   - site feeders and drinkers away from watercourses and ditches to minimise the risk of pollution, and move feeders to the top of fields away from gateways to minimise poaching and runoff
   - protect riverbanks and watercourses from uncontrolled access by livestock whilst providing suitable drinking points at watercourses or alternative sources of drinking water e.g. water troughs
   - when supplement feeding, provide sufficient feed blocks and liquid feeders that can be regularly checked and moved
   - use ATVs or reduce tyre pressures on tractors and small vehicles and improve vehicle access to reduce wheelings when managing feeders and drinkers. Consider alternatives such as housing stock during wet periods or using sacrifice areas if poaching remains a problem.

7. **Check** feeding and drinking areas regularly for signs of poaching and brown water runoff, particularly during wet weather. Move either your stock or feeders and drinkers if hoof marks from cattle appear deeper than 50mm (2 inches).

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Feeding and drinking areas - Practical examples

Lameness and injury

A study published in the Journal of Dairy Science found that lameness in dairy cows results in significant reductions in milk yield.

Lameness such as sole ulcer and digital dermatitis can be exacerbated by muddy, rough tracks and fields. Lameness affects between 9-11 cows/100 cows, with high yielding cows (thus the most productive financially) being more likely to be affected.

The study found that an estimated total mean daily reduction in milk yield per 305-day lactation was approximately 360kg (range of 160kg - 550kg).

Soils and crops

Careful management of out-wintered stock and equipment in order to avoid serious damage to soils and sward was undertaken on 5ha 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 grass to be reseeded @ £54/ha and 10% less loss of forage@ £24/ha. The total saving for 5ha was £390 with an immediate payback.

Providing drinking sites reduces costs and improves production

Remember

- Improved management of feeders and drinkers can help you to save money by reducing costs due to soil erosion, lameness, reduced grass yield, sward restoration and poor trafficability.
- If soil erosion and runoff from your farm causes water pollution you could be liable to prosecution, with consequential costs and fines.
- Remove all areas of permanent hardcore/concrete from your Single Payment Scheme (SPS) claim.

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.theriverstrust.org)

THE RIVERS TRUST

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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 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.

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