Confinement Area

This factsheet is one of a series developed for livestock owners with small farms. Each factsheet focuses on an area of management that will benefit the health of your animals, as well as the health of your property's natural resources.

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BMP Factsheet **Winter 2015**

Confined livestock areas are outdoor, nongrazing (or minimal grazing) areas in which livestock are confined by fencing or structures during the wettest months of the year (Oct.- March). Confined livestock areas may also be called sacrifice area, heavy use area, feedlots, arenas or paddocks. They all function to protect your valuable forage ground and reduce mud and manure runoff on other parts of your farm.

Consider the following when establishing and managing a confinement area.

Lot space needed per animal. It's best to minimize the size of your confinement area so manure collection and removal is easier and you maximize healthy usable pastures. In general horses need about 300-400 sq. ft., sheep 40 sq. ft. and beef cows 350 sq. ft. per animal. See livestock chart in the TIPS book for more details.

Best Management Practice (BMP) Factsheets

What is a Farm Plan	Small Farm Resources
Livestock Confinement	Composting
Reducing Mud	Pasture Management
Filter Strips	Wetlands

Locate and design so runoff is minimized. Careful consideration should be given to the location of these livestock holding areas. Choose a well-drained area away from existing streams, ponds, swales, wetlands or other clean water. Providing good footing materials such as pea gravel, hog fuel, wood chips and sand are some possible materials that can be used to keep these areas dry. Different footing materials are appropriate for different livestock types.

Using a confinement area for livestock during the winter months is critical for maintaining healthy pastures throughout the grazing months. Saturated soils and dormant or frozen plants cannot survive year round grazing or compaction caused trampling in the winter months. Visit the Small Farm Program page on our website to learn more about footing options.

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Install gutters and downspouts on barns and shelters to collect clean rain water. Locate downspout outlet pipes to divert clean water to a vegetated area away from animal confinement space. The idea is to prevent the clean roof water from mixing with manure in the confinement area and contributing to mud build up and polluted runoff. A 1" rainstorm produces 90 gallons of water running off a 12' x 12' roof. Collecting roof water in gutters and directing the runoff through downspouts away from animal confinement areas is a simple and immediate step toward reducing mud in the high traffic areas around buildings. Gutters and downspouts greatly reduce the mud problem around barns and shelters and help prevent manure and sediments from reaching waterways.

Once gutters and downspouts are installed, drain tiles may be used (with proper care and planning!) to intercept roof water and to re-direct that water away from or around animal confinement areas. Re-directing roof water away from animal confinement areas prevents that water from contributing to muddy conditions that often lead to polluted runoff reaching our natural waterways. Muddy areas should not be drained directly into streams, ponds or clean water ditches. Muddy water or drainage from an animal confinement area should drain into a vegetated area (i.e. a "filter strip"). A filter strips job is to intercept nutrients, sediment, and pathogens before they enter surface water. See filter strip fact sheet for more information.

Buildings and shelters should be located in high, well-drained areas. Avoid placing buildings close to streams, ponds, swales and wetlands. Check with Whatcom County Planning & Development Services (360-676-6907) for setback and permitting requirements.

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