

In My Experience

Controlling Mud on the Farm

By Bonnie Swenson

In the Northwest, we're famous for how much rainfall we receive each year. Not surprisingly, one of the main concerns for farmers in this area is how to control the mud that arrives each year with the rain. Here are the best tips I've gathered from livestock owners in the Northwest that have conquered the mud.

Around the Barn

The first and most important tool to control mud around your barn is gutters. Gutters with downspouts that drain water away from barn and well traveled areas will make the most difference and will be the best supporting piece of the puzzle in your quest for mud control. All of the other tips in this article will be more effective if gutters are in place.

One clever idea is to have your downspouts drain into tubs to collect rain water. This can be as simple as a brand new plastic trash can and lid with a hole cut in it for the downspout, or as complex as some systems available from such farm suppliers as Gempler's. Saving this rain water for a long summer or an emergency is a good idea. It can also be used to water your garden.

The other ingredients to your mud control system are black garden fabric (usually used when pouring concrete to make a driveway, and available at most hardware stores), gravel, and large wood chips (sometimes called Hog Fuel). One of the most common areas to have a problem with mud is around the openings to the barn such as stall doors or where ever the animals pass most often. The key in controlling mud is to act before the mud develops. During the summer months, purchase and lay down the black fabric in areas you know have a problem with mud.

Once the fabric is down, cover it with 3-6 inches of gravel. Cover the gravel with 3-6 inches of Hog Fuel. You may find that you need to refresh the Hog Fuel every few years, but your problems with mud will be gone. Some people choose to only put down Hog Fuel and not the fabric or the gravel, but they also find it necessary to replace the Hog Fuel annually. I cannot stress enough the importance of all three ingredients working together.

Around openings to stalls or gates where livestock travel most often, placing a rubber stall mat on top of the hog fuel can help cut down on the mud.

Around the watering trough

Mud can occur around the watering trough for several reasons. High foot traffic from your livestock, water overflowing from the trough, and rain. Placing your water trough off the ground can save it from an early demise. Many water troughs fit nicely on two tires side by side. This can help prevent rust, animals jumping or stepping in the trough and puncturing the bottom, or your trough sinking into the mud. With your trough off the ground, you can detect leaks more easily. Hog Fuel with a rubber stall mat around the trough also helps keep the mud down.