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Dakotaland Feeds, LLC

A NEWSLETTER OF DAKOTALAND FEEDS

It's Getting Deep...

Mother Nature has given us a taste of spring with milder temperatures, but the accompanying mud and slop were not as welcomed. With it looking like we are going to have a very wet and muddy spring, managing through this can impact your cattle in a number of different ways.

In a Nutshell:

- **Mud can reduce ADG by nearly 10-35%**
- **Bedding becomes necessary**
- **Comfort improves performance**
- **Scrape pads and pens if possible**
- **Give cows more space to avoid mud at calving**
- **Add pen maintenance to your summer calendar**

In the feedlot, mud can have a major performance drag. Average daily gain can decrease by 10-35% depending on the depth of mud the cattle are fighting. Both calves and finishing cattle are substantially impacted by the mud for a couple of reasons. First of all, if they have no bedding or dry area to lay down, cattle get tired of standing and expend more energy by having to stand all day. Second, having a wet and matted hair coat decreases the insulation value, which also increases the amount of energy spent on maintenance. Adding reluctance to drink or eat into the equation, because of the mud they have to traverse to eat or drink and you will take another hit to gains and conversion.

Mud Depth	Potential Loss of Gain
No Mud	0%
Dewclaw Deep	7%
Shin Deep	14%
Below Hock	21%
Hock Deep	28%
Belly Deep	35%

Data from Beef Feeder, University of Nebraska, 1991 as reported by DeRouchey, Marston, and Harner, How Feeding-site Mud and Temperature Affect Animal Performance, Kansas State University, February 2005.

Dealing with the mud sometimes means selling calves that you are backgrounding earlier than you had planned. Sometimes, you may need to use some cornstalks or other coarse roughage to build a base to put further bedding on. SDSU research suggests bedding can impact gains by as much as 1.0 lb/d in adverse weather conditions. Excessive mud may even mean you need to let calves out into pastures or fields that you normally do not utilize in an effort to get them somewhere dry to lay down and rest. If you question the value of having comfortable cattle, consider what the dairy industry knows to be true: If the cow isn't being milked, they want her spending less energy moving around and more time laying down and making more milk. Making improvements to cow comfort on the dairy side can result in 3-14 lbs/d more milk. We want the calves to rest because then they gain more weight.

Scraping pens might be impossible but if you can at least scrape the pads, that will help some. If there is an area in your pen that has built up and it isn't draining properly, you may need to dig it out to allow drainage to occur, which should hopefully help the pen's surface dry faster. If we get some colder weather and the ground temporarily firms up, scraping pens could help tremendously.

For cow-calf producers preparing for calving, letting the cows

into your calving pasture or giving them a bigger space may not be conducive to getting cows in that need assistance, but from a standpoint of cattle comfort and health it may be necessary. The tighter you keep the cows penned up, the more they dig up the ground and turn it into a spot where there isn't a decent place to calve. Again, establishing a base of bedding, commonly with corn stalks, bean stubble, or rough forages may be necessary before you can really even get a decent spot to bed the cattle.

Pen maintenance in the summer will be something that can help us down the road. Adding clay and fill back into the pens is one way to help pen conditions in the future. Getting the pens sloped properly at 3-5% will help improve drainage, as will incorporating some lime into the soil when you are rebuilding mounds. Lime helps with water shedding and allows the mounds to dry faster. Larger rock or fill could potentially be used, but beware that sharp edges when there is mud on top of it, could lead to increased incidence of foot rot. If you use larger fill material, make sure to cover it with more soil and get it shaped to allow runoff.

Mud is not fun for anyone to deal with and can be very detrimental to cattle performance and neonatal calf health. Managing through it can be difficult, and we may need to analyze what is going on now in order to make improvements later. In the meantime, keeping cattle out of the deepest mud may be the best we can do.

Roxanne Knock, PhD

What do you need to be thinking about this time of year?

- **Get colostrum replacement, electrolytes, and Calf Insure tubes to prepare for calving season**
- **Make sure mineral is in place for pre- and post-calving cows to promote re-breeding**
- **Book mineral for the breeding and grazing seasons**
- **Feed Rumensin to the cows to improve feed efficiency and to limit environmental coccidiosis prior to calving**
- **Check with your Feed Consultant to see if your ration is meeting the calves' needs and matching up with your feed resources**
- **Set up an implanting protocol for calves to finish**
- **Remember to get MGA if you are planning to use a synchronization protocol for your heifers to calve early**
- **Get the bulls in good body condition—they should be a BCS 5 or 6 at 60 d prior to breeding**
- **Remember to deworm the bulls also if they need to add some condition**

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