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## **Mud Management**

Some mornings, we are glad that the ground is frozen, just so we're staying on top of the mud for a few hours.

Layout is a key first step to permanent drainage solutions. Place buildings, material storage, feeding areas and shelters on higher ground. These areas will dry faster with an ideal slope between four and six degrees.

Plants can help reduce mud. A healthy stand of vegetation can take up moisture, anchor soil to prevent erosion and slow nutrient runoff. Compacted soil, such as from hoof traffic, has poor water infiltration, which means that liquids pool on the surface and runoff instead of soaking into the ground. This is where we have problems with nutrient runoff that leads to algae buildup in ponds, among other issues.

In heavy traffic areas, where mud tends to accumulate, think gates, driveways and dry lots, consider building a high-traffic pad. High-traffic pads improve drainage and provide stabilization through the use of multiple layers of permeable geotextile fabric and rock of various sizes. Ideally, these high traffic pads are located where there is not any vegetation or are compacted from frequent hoof traffic. Due to cost, it's rare that an entire dry lot would be constructed as a high-traffic pad. Rather, select specific areas within the dry lot with a maximum slope of six degrees to help ensure that footing does not wash away.

Some protocols for these high traffic pads involve removing at least 8 inches of topsoil, making the base level. If there is a good drainage point for water to go, then a drainpipe can be used, similar to a French drain system. A sheet of geotextile fabric is installed across the base of the pad. A 4-inch layer of crushed limestone is then added, and compacted with a vibratory plate compactor machine, and then another sheet of geotextile fabric. All this is topped with a 4-inch layer of footing like unwashed fine gravel or crushed bluestone, and again compacted with vibratory plate compactor.

Alternative footing options are popular in our area - this is just a fancy way of saying “Fill in the mud holes.” Low areas can be leveled off using fine crushed gravel, sand, other organic matter. Of course, the material used will determine the resistance and washout potential. Gravel will be considerably more durable than the pile of hay off the feed truck.

Taking preventative measures to manage mud can save time. Carefully choose where hay is stored and sites for winter feeding. Bacteria thrive in mud, especially when organic materials are present, like manure, hay or old feed. Problems like footrot and scours run rampant in muddy conditions, even in low temperatures.

Your local Natural Resource Conservation Service may have some financial assistance available for high traffic pads.

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