All-weather surfaces can improve livestock mobility

Source: Steve Higgins, CAFE director of environmental compliance

As an attentive livestock producer, you have probably noticed your animals tend to follow the same paths to get food and water. Over time, these well-traveled paths start to lose their vegetation and erode the topsoil, particularly if they endure heavy traffic from large animals. Erosion not only wears away your topsoil, but it makes it difficult for livestock to continue to effortlessly move along these paths. In wet weather, these paths get slick and muddy and can become treacherous for animals.

You can help your animals move along these paths by installing all-weather surfaces, such as mechanical concrete. Mechanical concrete uses tires, geotextile fabric and dense-grade aggregate stone to create a sturdy surface for animals to travel.

Use a backhoe or trackhoe with a 36-inch bucket to create an 8-inch-deep trench down the well-traveled path and cover the trench with nonwoven geotextile fabric. The fabric provides drainage, friction and overall path stability. Next, remove the sidewalls of the tires leaving the tread. Semitruck tires are the best size for this project. Once you install the tires in the path, cover them with dense-grade aggregate rock.

This pathway should last for many years and will allow your animals to use less energy moving around your farm.

You can get more information about installing these all-weather surfaces in the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension publication AEN 165: Improving Cow Paths. It is available online at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/AEN/AEN165/AEN165.pdf> or by contacting the (COUNTY NAME) Extension office.

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