

# Media Article

Thursday, November 19, 2015 | Media contact: Sarah Hetherington 0409 405 639

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## Consider stock containment areas

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The dry season conditions are resulting in a shift towards more mixed rations using grains, concentrates and bought-in fodder, rather than direct-grazed pasture. A stock containment area (SCA) can assist in managing a changed feeding system.

A SCA can:

- allow animals to be fed, watered and monitored in an easily managed confined area of the farm;
- reduce feed wastage of relatively expensive bought-in feeds;
- minimise weed infestation from purchased feeds;
- improve ground cover outside of the SCA and enhance pasture recovery when conditions improve; and
- allow control of shelter and shade to minimise stress on the contained animals.

A SCA should be considered as part of the property management plan and once established should be maintained and be available for use during challenging seasons and emergencies.

The SCA should protect the environment, if they are sited, designed, constructed and managed to ensure they do not:

- release contaminated runoff beyond the property boundary;
- cause adverse impacts of surface and groundwater quality, or the land; or
- cause adverse impacts on the amenity of surrounding uses (e.g. odour, dust and noise impacts on neighbouring landholders).

The SCA should also meet industry standards for cattle health and welfare, and animal husbandry.

The SCA will ideally be close to the dairy, hay sheds, silos and provide a surface that can be trafficked by machinery and animals in all weather conditions. Ideally, it would be situated on a moderate slope, well drained, stable soil such as clay or clay-loam.

The SCA should avoid areas of remnant vegetation and should be set back away from waterways or water storages.

An allowance of at least 9 - 12m<sup>2</sup> per cow is recommended, depending on the amount of time cows will be spending on the SCA.

Water troughs should be able to supply at least 20 litres per cow per hour at peak demand. Water requirements for high yielding lactating cows can be as high as 150 - 200 litres of water per day during peak summer demand.

The soil around the trough should be stabilised with stone or gravel.

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The feeding point should be located away from water troughs to reduce the chance of stock polluting the water by carrying feedstuffs in or on their mouths. Feeding space of 0.6-0.7 metres per head is recommended, but up to 1.0 metre per head space has been shown to help cows settle, increase feed intake and reduce wastage due to less competition and bullying.

If there are trees within SCA, utilise them for shade, but protect them with appropriate guarding.

Alternatively, shade and shelter can be provided using shade cloth and large rectangular straw bales orientated east-west to maximise the summer shade profile.

Be mindful to have a plan for heat stress, whether it be by providing adequate shade or simply moving the cows back to the dairy and turn the sprinklers on.

Any feeding area that will be used for more than two hours per day can increase the potential for faecal contamination of teats, leading to increased risk of clinical mastitis caused by environmental mastitis.

The risk can be reduced by keeping the area well drained and clean but you may need to consider more thorough pre-milking teat preparation before milking.

Good post-milking teat spray coverage will help and feeding cows on return from dairy will keep them standing long enough for the teat canal to close post milking.

Footrot and other foot infections are likely to increase if cows have to stand for more than four to five hours in mud and slurry, another reason for keeping the containment area clean and dry.

For more information on stock containment areas, a useful AgNote can be found at <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/recovery/livestock-after-an-emergency/stock-containment-areas>.

For those thinking of installing a feedpad, first ask yourself, do you really need it? There are some useful dedicated resources for feedpads listed below.

The Dairy Feedpads website with links to 'Guidelines for Victorian Dairy Feedpads and Freestalls'.

[www.dairyfeedpads.com.au](http://www.dairyfeedpads.com.au)

Dairy Cattle Feedpad Guidelines

[www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/publications/published\\_documents/farmworks](http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/publications/published_documents/farmworks)