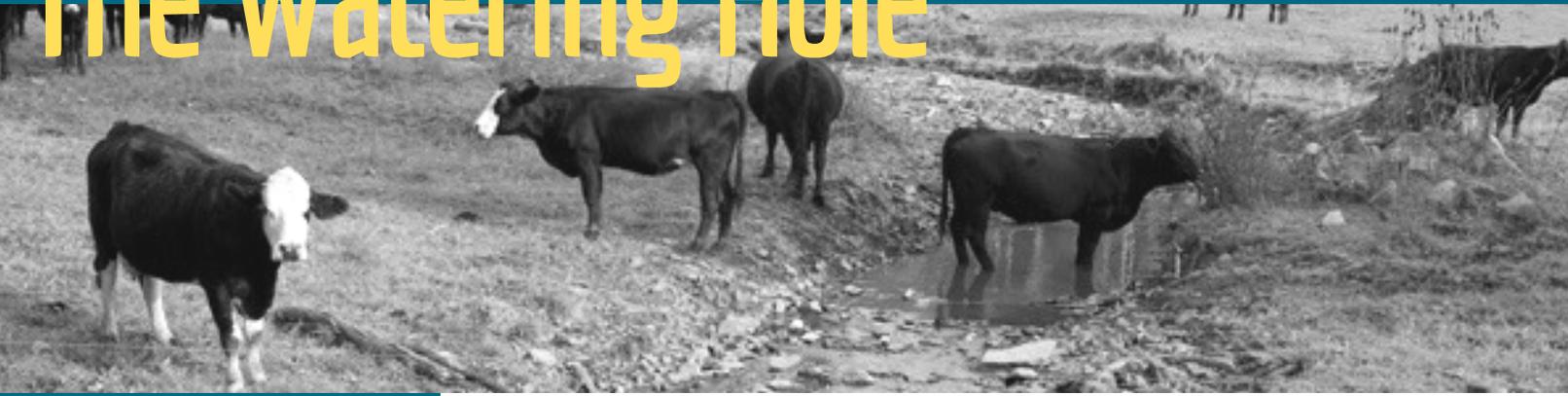


The Watering Hole



EXCLUSION FENCING AND STREAM CROSSINGS

We are back at the watering hole this month to talk about exclusion fencing and stream crossings. Simply put, exclusion fencing is a fence or barrier to keep livestock out of streams or other waterbodies. Streams can be a great natural and free source of water for livestock, but the impacts can outweigh the benefits. By fencing livestock out of waterways, farmers can ensure healthier streams and healthier herds, which both lead to a healthier bottom line.

Livestock fencing improves water quality and habitat health by preventing erosion and therefore keeping excess sediment out of a stream. Less sediment in a stream means lower turbidity, better temperature regulation, and overall cleaner water. When silt and muck settles, it can bury stream bottom habitat, so curbing erosion is also good for fish spawning and other wildlife. Keeping livestock waste out of a stream also improves water quality by keeping excess nutrients and harmful pathogens like E.coli out. Reducing excess nutrients in a stream leads to fewer algae blooms and nuisance aquatic plants, as well as healthier levels of dissolved oxygen. Fewer harmful pathogens mean safer water for recreation and other uses.

Livestock exclusion from waterways can also improve herd health. Instances of mastitis, leptospirosis, sickness from E. coli, and leg and calf injuries are all greatly reduced by restricting access to streams. Having an alternative watering facility with clean, fresh water constantly available can mean livestock will drink more, and drinking more water leads to healthy animals that put on weight quicker.

Livestock fencing improves a farm's bottom line by lowering operational costs and increasing productivity. Keeping excess sediment out of our streams and drains means less frequent drain clean-outs, saving the farmer on costly drain assessments. Preventing livestock diseases and injuries means lower costs for vet visits and medicines as well as less downtime or spoiled product. Along with cost savings, exclusion fencing can improve an operation's bottom line by streamlining and improving production. Moving herds from

pasture to pasture becomes much easier when they aren't running off into the creek or down steep banks. Also, animals put on weight quicker when they have reliable clean water such as an alternative watering source, which means faster production.

Of course, as with most things, livestock fencing is easier said than done. The exclusion of livestock decreases the area the livestock have to use, which can definitely be a drawback. The amount of pasture lost taken out of grazing varies depending on how far the farmer decides to set back the fencing from the stream. Another issue is that fencing alone usually will not work. Stable stream crossings, alternative watering facilities, and filters or buffers are often needed as well.

Stable stream crossings are necessary if pastures are divided by streams and the farmer wants cattle to still be able to access all of the pasturelands. Crossings are typically either in-stream crossings, with breakaway fencing and reinforced with rock, or over-stream crossings like bridges and culverts.

An alternative watering facility is often necessary as most times the stream served as the sole water source. The watering facility should be placed away from the stream and include concrete pads around the trough, as it will generally see heavier traffic and it is important to reduce the chances of erosion reaching the stream.

Although there is a lot to consider before undertaking an exclusion fencing and stream crossing project, the benefits of such a project can be tremendous. Planning and financial assistance for these practices are available at your local Conservation District and NRCS office.



Project Highlight: Failed Septic Replacement

Watershed Coordinator David worked with a homeowner who suspected he had a failed system, but was concerned about the cost of a replacement. The system was inspected, deemed failing, and replaced with assistance from cost share. It can be hard to source stone for standard drain fields during the winter months, so alternative materials were used to complete this system. These materials consist of dome shaped plastic chambers, commonly referred to as leaching chambers or infiltrator systems.



If you are looking to fence out livestock, contact your local Watershed Coordinator David at 269.908.4099 or david.comeau@macd.org for more information and to see if you qualify to have your project costs covered.