

Having a Flexible Feeding System will mean more cows in a smaller area for a longer period of time each day than in a pasture-based system, so you must have an effective system for handling solid and liquid effluent. Don't forget, it is illegal for effluent to leave the farm boundary or pollute waterways.

Solid and liquid effluent are full of nutrients that are normally purchased as fertiliser, so think of them as resources rather than wastes. Avoid costly mistakes by planning ahead.

Make a plan

A 240 cow herd that spends half its time in a confined area will produce more than six tonnes of effluent a day that needs to be removed and stored before using. How are you going to handle it?

- How much effluent is likely to be produced?
- Is your current effluent system designed to handle the extra load from a Flexible Feeding System?
- Where are the waterways?
- Is odour likely to be a problem?
- How much time are you prepared to spend flushing, scraping, spreading effluent?

You can't afford the risk of effluent escape from the farm







- What's the back up plan in case of a sudden heavy downpour? Remember – 1 mm of rain on 1 square metre of a hard surface will produce 1 litre of run-off that must be handled.

Farmer experience says that temporary feed-out areas can become permanent so it pays to think ahead.

Look at the options

It is likely that your current effluent management system is not adequate to accommodate a change to your feeding system.

Here are some options:

			
<p>A blade or front end loader can be used to scrape dry effluent.</p>	<p>Water is an option to flush effluent into a pond.</p>	<p>Feed-out areas can be sloped for minimal maintenance.</p>	<p>Solids separators can reduce the size of pond required and wear on pumps.</p>
		<p>Consider mixing wet effluent with irrigation water to distribute nutrients.</p>	<p>A rain water diverter can be installed to handle a sudden heavy rain downpour.</p>
<p>Stock pile dry effluent in preparation for spreading on paddocks.</p>	<p>Think about a solid waste spreader to distribute nutrients to poor paddocks.</p>		

Calculate the nutrient value of effluent

Spending money on an effluent system give you the opportunity to use 'waste' as a valuable nutrient resource. So, what's it worth?

In a scenario where 240 cows are spending half of their time in a feed-out area:

Test effluent, as nutrient values vary markedly between farms

	Excreted per cow per day	Nutrient collected per day for the herd	Equivalent in fertiliser per day	Value per day
Nitrogen	280-300 g	35 kg	75 kg	\$49 if urea is \$650/t
Phosphorus	50-60 g	7 kg	77 kg	\$27 if single super is \$350/t
Potassium	150-200 g	21 kg	42 kg	\$23 if potash is \$540/t

Tips

- Effluent management for your Flexible Feeding System should be part of your whole farm plan.
 - When is the last time you had a look at your whole farm plan? It's time to have another look.
- Get help to design a storage pond
 - There is help available to prepare a well designed effluent system. Start by contacting your local Department of Primary Industries office.
 - Ponds, in particular, require particular soil characteristics so get advice.
- Soil test annually to monitor your effluent system.
 - It is important to check for a build up of nutrients or salts caused by your effluent system.
 - Make better use of the nutrients by distributing them on lower fertility paddocks.
- Chat with other farmers to identify options that will work for you.
 - There are many creative and effective solutions in operation.
 - Ask other farmers 'what would they do differently with the benefit of hindsight'

Are you serious? That's almost \$20,000 in nutrients if the cows spend 200 days in the feed-out area. It might be worth an investment.

Plan ahead to avoid costly mistakes

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