

News Column

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## MORE MUD

My wife is the best! I don't often ask her to do chores because she's just not a barn girl. She has allergies that mess her up big-time, so we usually leave her in the house. However, when I leave town and take the kids with me, she takes an extra shot from her inhaler and jumps right in.

In recent years it seems like I've always left at least one kid home who could do chores, so Pam hasn't been our go-to girl for a while,....until the weekend after Labor Day. Prior to that, I remember leaving her with chores in April of 2013.

It rained while I was gone from April 17 to 19, 2013. It rained a lot. The sheep pens were a sloppy mess and I had a late lambing ewe lamb that dropped a lamb in a water puddle instead of in the shed. By the time I got home, my wife was all-in for me to build the barn of my dreams.

It's five and a half years later and we still haven't built that barn. You all know what happened Labor Day weekend,... and for the next three days. It rained. We're guessing between nine and eleven inches at our house Sunday night. Then it rained another inch over the next two days. And it rained about two inches on Wednesday.

I left for the Kansas State Fair on Thursday, taking two kids with me. The remaining child was off somewhere doing whatever high school girls do, then she left for a concert in Kansas City on Saturday.

Pam found mud boots.

Ours is admittedly a hobby farm, so a little mud is just an inconvenience for us. For livestock producers whose livelihood depends on their animals' performance, mud can be a serious problem.

Motivation to take action – to fix mud problems in feedlots – comes from knowing just a few numbers. Cattlemen need to remember that four to eight inches of mud reduces gain by about 14%, and 12 to 24 inches of mud reduces gain by about 25%.

In that deeper mud, you're adding one extra day to the feeding period for every four days the cattle have to slog through the mud. You can figure roughly 20 more pounds of feed needed to feed cattle that extra day, to get to the same weight they would have achieved without the mud.

Anyone who has done chores wearing rubber overshoes in deep mud knows that it takes a lot of effort to tromp through mud. It'll wear you out, and cattle can suffer from a similar effect. In muddy conditions, the effort required to make one more trip to the feed bunk might be more than they want to give, and consumption will decline too.

We can't totally eliminate mud in feedlots, but we can make conditions much better by cleaning pens and constructing mounds. For cattle, allow 25 square feet of mound space per animal. Construct mounds with a 1:5 slope on the sides and connect the end of the mound to the concrete pad behind the bunk so cattle don't have to slog through mud to get to the bunk.

For this part of the state, 300 square feet of pen space per animal is recommended. In western Kansas they might squeeze that down to 200 to 250 square feet per head, but we need the extra space here because we receive more moisture. You'll want about a 3-4% slope to carry water away from the bunk.

For more details about feedlot layout and pen design, refer to K-State's publication titled,

“Planning Cattle Feedlots”. If Google doesn’t take you right to it, call my office and we can get you a copy.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to [gmclure@ksu.edu](mailto:gmclure@ksu.edu).

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