

Supporting guidance for Livestock Tracks

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This [capital item](#) provides a contribution towards the costs of converting existing dairy cattle tracks on soft ground within fields to permanent hard core tracks. This option will also fund new tracks within fields where they provide alternative routes for dairy cattle in order to minimise their movements along public roads.

Benefits

Due to regular movements to and from the parlour, dairy tracks on soft ground often cause pollution due to run-off from severe poaching and erosion. This pollution source can be significantly reduced by replacing these tracks with well positioned and maintained hardcore tracks.

Well-designed tracks also allow cows to travel comfortably and easily over considerable distances from the parlour and can minimise lameness and improve udder hygiene due to cleaner cows.

What needs to be done

Note: Where an assessment has been carried out as part of the diffuse pollution audit there is no need to carry out the assessment noted below.

The first step is to use a map, such as a copy of the IACS map, to identify the location of all existing tracks and routes used by dairy cattle, along with the location of all ditches and watercourses on the farm.

The next step is to assess the risks these tracks and routes pose to the water environment.

This assessment should consider the following:

- proximity to nearby watercourses – the closer the area is to a watercourse, the greater will be the risk. Tracks which are within 10 metres will be of greatest risk. Note that, in many cases where dairy cattle use public roads, there may be drainage ditches at the side of the road
- slope of the land will be a significant factor – the steeper the downward slope towards a watercourse the greater the risk. Slopes of over three degrees (1 in 14) should be considered moderate risk and those above eight degrees (1 in 7) considered high risk. Tracks which discharge regularly to nearby grassland well away from watercourses will pose a low risk. Those which collect substantial rainfall and discharge directly to or near to a watercourse will pose a particularly high risk of causing pollution
- past experience – consider where it has previously been noted that run-off from the track has entered a watercourse
- repeated use of the tracks – the more often a track is used, the more likely it is to become poached, and the more manure etc. is it likely to collect increasing the risk of pollution

Once the assessment has been completed, use the map to identify those tracks or routes which may cause pollution of a watercourse. Finally, highlight the tracks that are to be upgraded to hardcore tracks and the proposed location of any new tracks which are to be created to replace routes along public roads.

Creating hardcore tracks

This will typically involve installing a permeable geotextile membrane and covering with a well compacted layer of sub base stone with a final covering of surface fines, e.g. ground limestone. Track material should be free from any matter of a size and shape which can be trapped between the cows claws.

For new cow tracks, it is not necessary to first strip off topsoil.

The depth of base stone required will depend on the particular site but a depth of 350 millimetres on average (i.e. 200 millimetres at edges and 450 millimetres at the centre of camber on a six metre wide track) should be the minimum considered.

Tracks should be a minimum of four metres wide, which will enable good movement for up to 200 cows. For every extra 100 cows add one metre extra width to the four metres.

The maximum gradient for a track with a loose surface can be up to 12 per cent, but ideally no more than eight per cent.

It is important to ensure that the run-off from the new or upgraded track is well managed. When creating the track ensure that the run-off from the area will not directly enter a watercourse or ditch etc. This may be achieved by ensuring the track cambers sufficiently to divert run-off into the adjacent field away from any nearby burn or ditch etc. Alternatively cross drains or sleeping policemen could be installed which could direct run-off onto land or to a swale or sediment trap prior to discharge to land.

Further information

- [The Prevention of Environmental Pollution From Agricultural Activity \(PEPFAA\) Code of Good Practice](#)
- [Farm and Water Scotland Know the Rules Guide](#)
- [Cow Tracks Guide, Healthy Feet Programme](#)