This fact sheet tells you about the environmental, feed and animal health issues you should consider before using sacrifice paddocks as part of your farm system, and how to manage any risks.

To minimise the risks you need to know what they are, and you need to be organised.

**Why use a sacrifice paddock?**

A sacrifice paddock is one way people choose to manage their cows and pasture when there are no purpose built stand-off facilities, or where off-farm grazing is not an option.

A sacrifice paddock can take the pressure off the rest of the farm by allowing grass cover to build up while vulnerable soils are wet. The regrowth of a small area of pasture can be sacrificed to enhance the regrowth on the rest of the farm. However, you need to do this in a way that is not risking the environment.

Some farmers use sacrifice paddocks when it is dry in autumn. By feeding supplements on a sacrifice paddock it allows future paddocks in the round to build up pasture covers.

**What risks do they present?**

- Soil structure can be damaged due to compaction leading to impaired drainage properties.
- There is also the potential for sediment and effluent run-off to enter waterways from disturbed soil. Environment Waikato does not have any rules specifically on the use of sacrifice paddocks. However, the rules state that no effluent should be discharged into waterways.
- The often muddy and wet conditions in sacrifice paddocks can increase the risk of mastitis and lameness if animals are not well managed.
- There is a chance that cows may not get their daily feed requirements while on the sacrifice paddock.

**How do I choose the best spot for my sacrifice paddock to minimise environmental risks?**

Choose the flattest paddock available; one with free-draining soils which is away from waterways. This will reduce the risk of run-off.

Paddocks with mole or tile drains running through them are not suitable for sacrifice paddocks, as sediment and effluent can enter these drains. Sloping paddocks also have a higher risk of sediment run-off, so steer clear of them.
If the only suitable location on your property is next to a waterway ensure there is a wide fenced grassed buffer between the paddock and the waterway to trap potential sediment run-off.

**How do I keep my animals in good condition while on a sacrifice paddock?**

- To reduce the risk of mastitis use appropriate teat seal and dry-cow therapies. When it is really muddy consider running your cows through the dairy and teat spraying. For more information on minimising mastitis check your SAMM plan.
- Monitor lame cows and treat appropriately. For more information on lameness refer to DairyNZ’s Healthy Hoof programme [www.dairynz.co.nz/healthyhoof](http://www.dairynz.co.nz/healthyhoof).
- Ensure feed intakes are maintained.

**How do I avoid having to use a sacrifice paddock?**

- Planning ahead is the best way to minimise the need for on-off grazing facilities.
- Part of planning involves proactively monitoring pasture covers and updating your feed budget to meet average pasture cover targets.
- Some farmers work their round so paddocks more prone to pugging are used when it is still dry leaving dryer paddocks which are less prone to pasture damage for use during wet conditions. In doing so they reduce the changes they will need to use a sacrifice paddock.

Consider the alternatives.

**What are the alternatives?**

- Actively manage your grazing round to take wet parts of the farm into consideration
- Off-farm grazing – e.g. on a run-off
- Purpose-built stand-off/ wintering facility
- On-off grazing with cows standing in the yard during particularly wet weather events – this is only suitable for less than 12 hours a day and less than 2 days in a row.

**How do I renovate a sacrifice paddock?**

- Loosen the topsoil using a soil aerator
- Regrassing or undersowing helps to restore the pasture and protects the bare soil from further deterioration from subsequent grazing and raindrop impact
- Growing a summer crop will help break up the compacted soil through cultivation and the crop’s roots will help restore soil structure.

**Where can I find further information?**

- Farm Enviro Walk [http://www.dairynz.co.nz/farmenvirowalk](http://www.dairynz.co.nz/farmenvirowalk)
- DairyNZ farm Fact 5-8 Limiting pugging and compaction damage [http://www.dairynz.co.nz/farmfacts](http://www.dairynz.co.nz/farmfacts)
- Managing Treading Damage on Dairy and Beef Farms in New Zealand. Available from AgResearch [www.agresearch.co.nz](http://www.agresearch.co.nz) or Keith Betteridge 06 351 8053
- Environment Waikato [www.ew.govt.nz](http://www.ew.govt.nz)
- Visual Soil Assessment (Field guide and Soil Management Guidelines). Talk to your regional council for a copy