

News Column

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MUD, MUD, MUD

My kids have – mostly, but not entirely – been denied the pleasure of doing a half hour of chores daily in ankle deep mud. Last week got kind of busy for me, so they got the evening chore shift most of the week during the monsoon. Other than that, they have missed out and won't have exciting mud stories to tell their own kids someday.

I guess a couple of the kids do have some pig stories from last summer. Last year was our first year with pigs since I exited the hog business in 1986. I was reluctant, but Ryan convinced me that he should have a pig. Samantha thought the first one was cute, so we bought two more. And, they both suddenly had a new set of chores that were all their own.

Little brother was the whip-cracker in this operation. He refused to do chores for his older sister and insisted that she help, even if it required banging on her bedroom door for 10 minutes before she stomped out, slammed the door, and grudgingly did her part. It made me smile to watch my 12-year-old do a better job of parenting than I had ever done, up to this point in my career as a dad.

In return for his insistence on her actually doing her work, Samantha tried to make her brother's life miserable at times. I didn't get to witness the fun, but they told me later about the time she just walked away and left him in the middle of the pig pen with one boot already sucked off by the mud and the other about shin deep. I've been there, and there isn't much she could have done to help. Nonetheless, I'm sure he will pay her back in some way this summer when

they get their next set of pigs.

I started this story as a segue to a discussion about the challenges of feedlot mud. As usual, I got off track and you're going to be stuck with more story than fact. But, I'm getting there. Here's what we know about feedlot mud, and why we need to avoid it as much as possible.

- For cattle, feedlot mud four to eight inches deep can decrease feed intake by five to 15 percent.
- When temperatures drop to 21 to 39 degrees Fahrenheit, mud dew claw deep can cause a 7% decrease in cattle gains.
- Mud shin deep can knock gains by more than twice that, roughly 15%.
- Mud belly deep can depress gains by 25%.
- Combine the lost gain with increased energy requirements to survive in muddy, wet conditions, and the cost of gain can increase by over 50% in deep feedlot mud.

There's not a lot you can do in the midst of a mud event, other than plan for the future. You can plan now to fix the problems that caused pens to be such a mess during the most recent monsoon.

The obvious first step is to clean manure out of pens when they are dry. Then, producers should seriously consider adding mounds to their feedlot or backgrounding pens. Those mounds should run parallel to drainage so they don't obstruct runoff, and should connect to the concrete feed apron so cattle can travel from mound to apron without sloshing through a sea of mud.

Mounds should be oriented to provide protection from prevailing winds during times when wind is the problem instead of rain. Tops of mounds should be 5 to 10 feet wide, and sides should slope about 4:1. When completed, each side of the mound should provide about 20-25

square feet per head.

Mounds built primarily with clayey soils are best, while mounds built with a mixture of soil and manure are less desirable. Either will require some annual maintenance to remove manure and re-shape the mounds.

Properly constructed mounds will provide a dry place to lie down or stand, as well as some protection from cold winter winds. And, you can expect improved gains, improved feed efficiency, and greater profitability.

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 [gmcclure@ksu.edu](mailto:gmcclure@ksu.edu).

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