

## Weighing Your Options

Open cattle feedlots continue to be the cheapest way to run a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO), but they come with several downfalls. One of the most glaring drawbacks of an open feedlot is the susceptibility of manure runoff into neighboring water bodies. Open feedlots are the least environmentally-friendly way to raise cattle.

But that's not all – open feedlots also do not maximize nutrient availability in manure. When a farmer scrapes an open feedlot they only get back a portion of the manure content for cropland application.

Other weaknesses of open feedlots include a lack of protection against extreme weather, which could lead to decreased productivity and more animal health issues.

In this brochure we'll show you that, long-term, a covered, total containment building will not only provide great environmental benefits, but can make you a more productive livestock producer as well.

### Comparing Your Options

On the following pages we'll compare three feedlot options – bedded pack barns, deep pit buildings and open feedlots – in these categories:

- ◇ Environmental Protection
- ◇ Manure Management
- ◇ Animal Health/Production
- ◇ Weather Protection
- ◇ Cost
- ◇ Durability/Maintenance

These categories will be ranked on the following scale:

🐄 = Poor

🐄 🐄 = Fair

🐄 🐄 🐄 = Good

🐄 🐄 🐄 🐄 = Excellent

## Assistance Available

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial and technical assistance for livestock producers to address runoff or other environmental issues from open feedlots.

Through the conservation planning process and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), NRCS staff can help you through the decision-making, application and financial assistance process. NRCS offers financial and technical assistance to convert an entire farmstead open feedlot to a confined roofed system for beef and dairy operations. Visit your local NRCS for more information.

### CNMP

If a producer utilizes EQIP to transition an open feedlot to a covered system, they are required to apply a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) to their entire operation. A CNMP is a specific plan for a CAFO that addresses the management and treatment necessary for the operator to protect soil and water resources. The plan also helps guide the producer through manure and wastewater handling and storage, nutrient management, land treatment practices, record keeping, feed management and other utilization activities.

For more information about open feedlot management and NRCS programs, visit:

[www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov)



United States Department of Agriculture



# Open Feedlot Management

## Best Options

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Des Moines, Iowa  
Helping People Help the Land

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

*Option 1*

**Bedded Pack (Solid Manure) Barn**



**M**onoslopes, A-Frames and hoop buildings are metal or canvas roofed barns. They are total containment structures that house livestock.



These buildings typically have three or more pens, cement walls and floors, a contained manure storage area, bedding for livestock, optional curtains for weather extremes, and feeding and watering areas.



**How do bedded pack barns rank?**

Environmental Protection	🐄🐄🐄🐄
Manure Management	🐄🐄🐄🐄
Animal Health/Production	🐄🐄🐄
Weather Protection	🐄🐄🐄🐄
Initial Cost	🐄🐄🐄
Durability/Maintenance	🐄🐄🐄🐄

*"My monoslope building has completely eliminated manure runoff issues. Managed properly, nothing runs out of this building. When I scraped my old open feedlot, it was about one-quarter dirt. I know it's all pure manure now."*

**Clint Sonderman**  
Shelby County Livestock Producer

*Option 2*

**Deep Pit (Liquid Manure) Barn**



**D**eep pit buildings are roofed barns, similar to bedded pack barns, but with a liquid manure storage area underneath a concrete slatted floor.



The deep pit safely stores the liquid manure from dairy and other livestock operations until the farmer is ready to utilize it.



**How do deep pit barns rank?**

Environmental Protection	🐄🐄🐄🐄
Manure Management	🐄🐄🐄🐄
Animal Health/Production	🐄🐄🐄
Weather Protection	🐄🐄🐄🐄
Initial Cost	🐄🐄
Durability/Maintenance	🐄🐄🐄

*"We have a direct impact on water quality to the Mississippi River and we take that seriously. (The deep pit barn) was a really nice project to get completed with NRCS assistance."*

**David Petersen**  
Muscatine County Dairy Producer

*Option 3*

**Open Feedlot**



**O**pen feedlots are the least expensive type of CAFO and perhaps require the least amount of weekly labor (scraping and bedding).



However, open feedlots without total containment fall way behind covered lots that provide total waste containment, better manure availability, and healthier animals.



**How do open feedlots rank?**

Environmental Protection	🐄
Manure Management	🐄
Animal Health/Production	🐄🐄
Weather Protection	🐄
Initial Cost	🐄🐄🐄🐄
Durability/Maintenance	🐄🐄

*"When my son began feeding dairy cows we had issues with runoff on our feedlot. Now we have two hoop buildings which has allowed us to expand the operation and has completely eliminated runoff problems."*

**Monty Ide**  
Union County Livestock Producer