

Providing Water to Pastured Livestock

Plentiful, reliable, good quality water is essential for grazing livestock. Without good water, it doesn't matter how effective other grazing management practices might be. But how important is the location of that water? Cattle resist traveling far from water. They graze very little when more than a half mile away from water in rough country or a mile away on flat land. Under 1000 feet is ideal. If they do travel far for water, they spend less time grazing, they burn off pounds walking, and they graze distant areas incompletely.

Poor water distribution also transfers nitrogen, phosphorus, and other nutrients as manure and urine are deposited near water sites or along the path to water. Nutrients in these deposits are concentrated and wasted in areas with little grass. A more even distribution of these deposits would grow more grass.

How can you improve your water distribution? More ponds, windmills, wells, and dugouts will help, but they can get expensive. Plus, they can only be placed in certain locations and can't be moved. So my preference often is to use a pipeline. They can be put almost anywhere, and water lines are less expensive than you might think. Most folks can get pipe and frost-proof trenching for less than one dollar/foot, especially if you can get cost-share funds. You also can leave your pipe on top of the ground, saving trenching costs, if you only need water during the growing season.

Over time, these water improvements pay for themselves with better grass and improved animal performance.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu



University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.. Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.