



FEMA

Moo-ving On Up: Critter Pads Keep Farm Animals Safe From Floods

The State of Washington - When flood impacts a farm community, there are many challenges and complications. Not only must residents get themselves out of harm's way, but they also must protect their livestock, secure farm equipment and supplies, and deal with many other issues.

Jason Roetcisoender's family has owned their 120-acre farm in Duvall, Washington since the 1920s. Throughout that time, there have been numerous floods that have impacted their home and property. In a flood in 1975, while the farm was run by Jason's father, they lost 32 cows. In Duvall's flood-of-record in 1990, the family lost 120 animals to high water.

"After the flood in 1990, Washington State and King County approved emergency permitting for the installation of critter pads," said Mr. Roetcisoender. "The local farmers, including my father, went to them to try to find a solution to the flooding, and that was one of the remedies they came up with."

A critter pad, or livestock flood sanctuary mound, is an area where approved fill material is used to raise the ground above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE). When flooding occurs, farmers move their livestock onto the pads to keep the animals out of the water's reach. Critter pads require special permitting and must be specifically designed to ensure they have a negligible impact on the floodplain. They also may not be built within the boundaries of a river's floodway.

Since the Roetcisoenders completed their critter pad in 1991, they have had to use it on three occasions, including the November flood of 2006. In that November 2006 incident, Mr. Roetcisoender was able to move over 300 head of cattle onto the pad and keep them safe. They also filled two of the family's trucks with feed and drove them up onto the pad to be safe and easily accessible.

In the nearby Town of Carnation, Michelle Blakely has a 33-acre farm where she grows organic vegetables and fruits, and raises chickens, cows, pigs, and turkeys. When they purchased the farm two years ago, a critter pad was already in place, built by the previous owner. According to Mrs. Blakely, the pad was part of the incentive to acquire the land.

Unfortunately, in 2006, when the waters rose during the November flood, despite being above the BFE, it turned out the pad was not high enough. Upon returning to their home following a mandatory evacuation, the Blakelys found that all their chickens and turkeys were gone.

The Blakelys suffered significant financial damage to their farm from the 2006 flood, a good portion of it in poultry losses. Not wanting to go through this again, they decided to raise the critter pad even higher. They purchased permitted fill, rented a bulldozer, and raised the pad almost three feet.

When the floodwaters came again in December of 2007, the Blakelys felt they were ready. Working fast, the Blakelys managed to relocate their birds from coops on different areas of their property to the elevated pad, even as rising waters surrounded them. If the chickens and turkeys had not been moved to the critter pad, they would have been lost. This time, the Blakelys managed to save almost 1,500 birds from floodwaters.



**King County,
Washington**



Quick Facts

Year:

1990

Sector:

Private

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Elevation, Structural

Primary Funding:

Homeowner