

AL 302 / FEED TROUGH PRACTICE STANDARD

PURPOSE - The primary purpose of a feed trough is to hold and dispense feed, such as hay, grains, pellets, or other types of animal feed, in a controlled and accessible manner. This helps ensure that animals receive the necessary nutrition and supplemental for their growth, health, and overall well-being.

RESOURCE CONCERN - To assist cattle producers in evaluating their current feeding practices and their impact on water quality, you should begin by understanding the types of feed used, feeding methods, feeding frequency, and overall management of feeding. You need to research and identify the potential pollutants that can result from cattle feeding operation such as nutrient runoff (nitrogen and phosphorus), sediment, pathogens, and chemicals from feed additives. The goal is to strike a balance between sustainable cattle production and maintaining water quality to ensure the long-term health of both the operation and the surrounding environment.

MANAGEMENT - Properly designed and managed feed troughs are essential for ensuring that animals receive the appropriate nutrition without unnecessary waste or contamination. Cleanliness, accessibility, and the type of feed being provided are important factors to consider when using feed troughs to maintain the health and productivity of livestock.

Beef cattle spend much of their lives grazing forage that is available for grazing most of the year. However, there are times when cattle may need to be supplemented or fed, specifically when there is a forage or nutrient deficit or when greater animal performance is desired. Supplementation and feeding programs are not the same for every cattle operation.

Feed costs represent the majority of expenses incurred in any production segment of the beef cattle industry. While forages are utilized as the major source of nutrients for beef cattle in Alabama, forages often do not contain adequate nutrients to support a desired level of production. In these situations, supplementation is often required to achieve production goals.

REQUIREMENTS - The minimum number of single type head of livestock, regardless of sex or age, at one time during the last 12 months is 20 head. Bunk feeders are longer, open troughs designed to hold larger quantities of feed. They allow multiple animals to feed side by side. Bunk feeders should be placed in an accessible area that allows animals to approach the trough comfortably. Proper drainage is important to prevent water from accumulating in the trough and spoiling the feed. Consideration of anchoring to the ground might be needed to prevent tipping or movement, especially if larger animals are using them. Specifications and considerations for a bunk feeder trough are:

System setup must include minimum purchase of:

- Pre-cast concrete bunk feeder *or* metal feed trough – *new equipment only*.
- Heavy Use Area Protection – must extend the length of the troughs. Refer to NRCS practice code 561 Heavy Use Area Protections for specifications.

It is recommended that a system be built within a fence-line (new or existing) with access from a road or a farm lot.