

# Is going under cover the answer?

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STAND-OFF AND covered stand-off

structures might be the answer for farmers trying to balance higher stocking numbers and more

stringent environmental demands, says Hamish McMillan, of HerdHomes. Research done

by Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Jan Wright, showed nearly 300,00oha



Stand-off and covered stand-off structures could be the answer in balancing higher cow numbers with more stringent environmental demands.

of traditional sheep and beef land was converted into dairy farms between 1996 and 2008 - with most conversions in Canterbury, Otago and Southland.

Using results from a simplified version of Overseer, Wright’s report revealed rivers saw nitrogen increases of between 20-30% in Canterbury, 10-20% in Otago and 15-20% in Southland during that time.

McMillan says regional councils have taken notice of river quality and conversations he has had with staff and policy makers on the Canterbury and Otago regional councils suggest government restrictions could be introduced on how many conversions can take place.

“We’ve got examples of dairy farmers of meeting proposed standards and doing everything the councils want.

“Councils just want to see more acknowledgment being made of the environmental impacts dairying has made and more steps being made to mitigate that.”

McMillan believes an on-off grazing system supported by a covered or uncovered stand-off pad could be the best way forward, especially on properties with higher stocking rates.

“The rest of the world pretty much focuses on all year round housing while New Zealand focuses on all year round outdoor grazing.

“On-off grazing is a new way that people are trying to get their heads around.”

As effluent doesn’t come in contact with rainwater, it can be stored as a solid in bunkers.

**Effluent from stand-off pads and structures can be applied strategically, eliminating chances of runoff. Studies carried out by Massey University back this theory up.**

With on-off systems, stock spend 2-3 hours of their day on stand-off pads, only going onto pastures to graze.

By doing this, McMillan says the majority of effluent and urine, the main factors behind nitrogen leaching, is contained and stocks are kept off pasture when it is at its most sensitive.

“It’s not just shelter; it’s a management system on how we can enhance pastoral grazing system with shelter.”

McMillan says effluent from stand-off pads and structures can be applied strategically, eliminating chances of runoff. Studies carried out by Massey University back this theory up, showing that on-off systems produced 60% less nitrogen leaching than operations under a 24 hour grazing system.

Covered feed pads, like those offered by HerdHomes, also provide extra shelter for animals while cutting down on the effluent storage space requirements, says McMillan.

This does not come with the same resource consent requirements and is easier to spread on pastures.

Northland farmer, Steven Holland, says placing a roof over his 105m x 10m feed pad cut effluent storage requirements from 20,000 m3 to 5000m3.

“The runoff completely vanished. Not one ounce of water comes off the feed pad even in the pouring rain.”

McMillan says the company has further expanded storage capabilities with the release of three bunker systems, which increase effluent storage capacity on HerdHomes structures by 50%.

HerdHomes account manager Zoe Pow says some form of stand-off structure makes sense for anybody with a higher than average stocking rate.

“If your stocking rate is above the district average then you should be looking into some form of stand-off facility.”

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