

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 downsides. 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 – steel roofed barns, hoop 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 for Covered Feedlots

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial and technical assistance for livestock producers interested in building a hoop building or monoslope building.

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 payment rates of \$205 - \$287 per animal unit, and in some cases more, to convert an entire farmstead open feedlot to a confined roofed system for beef and dairy operations.

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

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Open Feedlot Management

Best Options



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Helping People Help the Land

Option 1

Steel Roofed Barn



Monoslopes and A-Frames are common steel roofed barns. They are large, total containment structures that house livestock. Monoslopes are perhaps most identifiable by their sloped roof or truss.



These sturdy 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 a feeding area.

How do steel roofed 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

Hoop Building



Hoop buildings are a longer, narrower version of monoslope barns, and provide many of the same advantages.



The difference is in the cover, or roof. Hoop buildings have a canvas tarp that may only last up to 20 years before needing to be replaced. However, a more durable polyethylene cover is now being offered by hoop building manufacturers.

How do hoop buildings rank?

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

"A hoop building was the best alternative for me. It's a lower cost alternative than a monoslope barn and it's still environmentally-friendly. For my first hoop building, I am really happy with it."

Jacob Johnson
Hancock County Livestock Producer

Option 3

Open Feedlot



Open 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