



FACT SHEET 5.1

ANIMAL SPACE NEEDS

Small acreage hobby farms are often located in higher density areas with residential neighbors rather than in rural, less populated areas. Lacking the wide protective buffers that larger and more rural farms often have, hobby farms can be located not only close to neighbors but close to surface waters such as ponds, streams, and coastal waters.

Despite the smaller land area, a wide range of animals can be found on hobby farms. Proper land management is essential to ensuring that farming activities are sustainable and compatible with surrounding land uses to protect water quality, as well as to provide for the health and well-being of your animals.

WHAT IS MY STOCKING RATE?

Your hobby farm 'stocking rate' is how many animals your property can support and reasonably sustain. The number of animals that your hobby farm can safely support is based partially on your (and your land's) ability to:

- Provide feed and water
- Manage manure
- Provide access to pasture and exercise areas
- Provide shelter
- Manage your land

One of the largest sources of surface water pollution originating from hobby farms comes from those farms that cannot support the number of animals on them. Too many animals living in too small an area can produce more manure than can be properly managed and cause pastures to be overgrazed and eroded. Both of these problems can increase the chances of sediment, nutrients and harmful bacteria being carried by stormwater runoff and polluting nearby waterbodies.



Keep in mind that not every hobby farm utilizes pasture. However, if your hobby farm does not contain pasture, then supplemental feed must be purchased (and stored). Also, your animals will still require an adequately sized exercise yard and you will need a realistic manure management plan to support your animals.



REGULATORY CHECK

Some communities have local bylaws or regulations that limit the number of animals per acre or require a certain acreage per animal. Visit your Town or City Hall for more information on specific rules that might apply.

HOW MUCH PASTURE IS NEEDED?

If you are utilizing pasture for feed then you need to ensure that you have adequate managed area for this purpose. Pasture areas differ from livestock yards, paddocks and turnout areas in that pastures provide some or all of the food (forage crops) during the growing season for grazing animals. While these other areas are generally smaller in size without substantial vegetation, a well maintained, well vegetated pasture is important to long-term pasture use, the protection of nearby surface water quality and overall animal health.

The general consensus is that one to two well managed acres of quality land is recommended for each 1,000 pounds of livestock or animal. Based on average weights, this translates into approximately:

- 1 horse or cow per 1-2 acres
- 2 small ponies per 1-2 acres
- 4-6 sheep or goats per acre
- 2-3 llamas per acre
- 4-6 alpacas per acre
- 2-5 pigs per acre

The above stocking rates are only an approximation, as every location is unique and animal needs differ. The number of animals your hobby farm is able to support will depend on various factors. For instance, pastures that have bare ground, weeds, areas that animals won't graze, slow plant growth, soil compaction, erodible sloped land and other problem areas will support fewer animals. High quality and fast-growing pastures, rotational grazing and supplemental feeding can help increase the number of animals your hobby farm can sustain in an environmentally friendly manner.

WHAT ABOUT SHELTER?

Your animals will also need shelter from adverse weather, especially during the cold and snowy winter months, but also to protect them from the hot summer sun and during windy days. This could be in the form of a barn or a 3-sided lean-to structure. Shelter should ideally be located on top of a slight rise so that stormwater does not run into the structure, and if open sided, should face south to avoid facing prevailing wind directions.

THE RESPONSIBLE HOBBY FARMER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE SPACE NEEDS OF EACH TYPE OF ANIMAL KEPT ON THE HOBBY FARM, INCLUDING SPACE NEEDED FOR MANURE MANAGEMENT AND THE STORAGE OF FEED, BEDDING AND EQUIPMENT.

HELPFUL LINKS

www.extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000471_Rep493.pdf

www.ag.umass.edu/crops-dairy-livestock-equine/fact-sheets/basics-of-pasture-management

www.ag.umass.edu/crops-dairy-livestock-equine/fact-sheets/livestock-grazing-stocking-rates

www.ag.umass.edu/crops-dairy-livestock-equine/fact-sheets/livestock