



Mid-winter Minders

If you are planning to head to the snow this winter or escape to a tropical island it is important to make early arrangements for someone to look after your property and livestock.

Have a clear list of instructions and important information ready and take the time to walk the property with them and cover any issues that might arise.

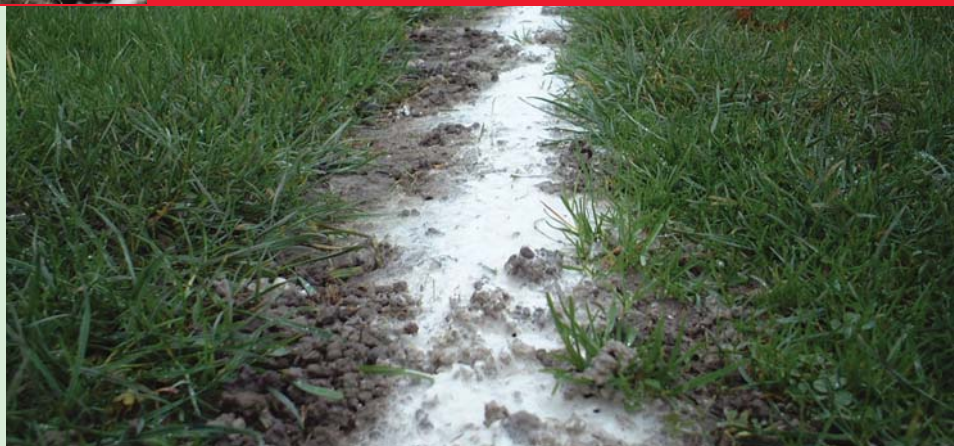
Make sure the person looking after your property can locate the following;

- A farm map with the grazing round clearly marked.
- The main power fence control and earth pegs.
- Spare standards, fencing pliers, wire joiners, wire, insulators, rammer, spade and a sledgehammer.
- Spare gate and netting.
- Main water control to turn the supply off.
- Various parts in the pump house which need attention (add the contact number for the water pump company just in case!)
- Some treatment advice for common livestock problems.
- Your local Vet's number - daytime and after hours mobile.

Security has now become a major issue for anyone going away this winter. Make sure your neighbours know that you are away and a minder is in charge. Ask your neighbours to keep an eye out for anything out of the ordinary such as panicking stock or suspicious vehicles.

Most burglars work business hours and are opportunists. Do not leave farm tools or ladders lying around. They are very keen on re-selling fuel, ATV's, ride-on mowers, chainsaws, sprays and drenches.

Be aware of health and safety issues and your responsibilities under the law. You should have a Safety Policy to give to anyone coming on to the farm. This lists hazards that could not be eliminated so have been isolated and protected. Make sure the checklist is up to date.



Prevent Pugging Paddocks

Soils are a farmer's most valuable resource so every effort should be made to keep them in good physical and biological health. Moist and wet soils are less able to support the weight of grazing stock than dry soils. Treading on moist soils can lead to compaction and animal hooves cause pugging damage.

Pugging reduces a soil's performance because its structure has changed. Pugging damage increases the soil's density but decreases its porosity, drainage and aeration. Damaged soils stay wetter much longer and because wet soils are more easily pugged this compounds the pugging problem. A pugged surface can result in a compacted layer about 5-10 cm down, impeding plant growth and drainage.

The best way to avoid this is to prevent pugging. This can be achieved by moving stock to a hard pad or sacrifice area when pugging damage is likely to occur. Alternatively you can drain any wet areas. A pugged soil may need cultivation to aid its recovery and could possibly require a fallow period without any crop or pasture on it. Damaged and re-sown sacrifice paddocks will produce less than their potential even after cultivation until the soil structure fully recovers.

When a paddock becomes pugged during a wet spell then it needs to be nursed back into good health. Soils are not just dirt - they are a growing medium for plant roots, a source of essential nutrients for plants and animals and are home to a myriad of small animals, microbes and seeds.

A pugged soil should not be subjected to intensive grazing especially with heavyweight livestock. Furthermore, keep heavy vehicles off these soils when they start becoming wet.

Handy Hint

Earthworms are great for aerating soil which enables plant roots to develop as they turn over the soil continuously. Good quality soils under pasture will normally contain more than 500 earthworms per square metre, which is equivalent to more than 30 in two spades of soil. Earthworm populations may be boosted by; reducing stocking on compacted areas, improving drainage on soils prone to water logging, using irrigation on soils prone to extreme drying and applying lime and fertiliser to improve pasture growth.