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Cleaning Stock Tanks – Priority?

A clean stock tank with high-quality water promotes healthy livestock. Nursing calves have a nine percent higher weight gain when drinking water from a trough rather than from a pond. Poor tasting water can influence forage intake. Drinking more water can mean more efficient forage consumption. Viruses, parasites, and bacteria thrive in tanks that are not properly cleaned.

Keeping your stock tank clean can be a challenge in the summer. Warm summer temperatures, abundant sunlight, and nutrients mix together to create ideal conditions for algae growth. Nutrients from slobber, excrement, leaves, or other debris can stimulate harmful algae growth. Algae changes the taste of water, and some types are even toxic, like blue-green algae, which is toxic to livestock. Using fencing or other barriers to limit livestock access to ponds can mitigate nutrient introduction. Barriers should be low enough that critters won't slip underneath.

Most tanks should be drained and cleaned once or twice a year. Add one part of household chlorine bleach for 32 parts of water. Let the water sit for 15 minutes. Drain and scrub the tank well. Keep livestock away from the tank for at least 30 minutes after cleaning. Getting the tank empty can be difficult unless the tank has a built-in drain. In the case of no drain, turn the water off and let the livestock drink the water down to a point where it can be managed.

Once the tank is cleaned, there are a few ways to keep it clean. First, keep debris (leaves, dead plants) out of the tank. Two ounces of household chlorine bleach to fifty gallons of water weekly will help regulate algae growth. Or copper sulfate, an eighth of a teaspoon per hundred gallons.

Goldfish are also an option for algae control. Add four to six goldfish per 100 gallons of tank capacity. Goldfish survive best when the temperature is at least sixty degrees, they need bricks, rocks, or some structure to hide from predators like birds or raccoons. Fish kills are a concern if the water level gets too low and there is not enough oxygen or in the winter when it's too cold.

Keeping the troughs out of direct sunlight can also help minimize algae growth. Freeze-proof troughs, such as floating ball top waterers, work well in cold weather and work to keep water cool in the summer.

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