

Clean Paddocks

A paddock is a relatively small fenced in area where a horse is turned out for exercise during the non-grazing season which may consist of three to nine months. Paddocks by nature collect a lot of mud and manure and are a relatively unattractive area of the farm. It's the area in which the herdsman needs high boots to check the water or deliver the hay during inclement times. For the horse he spends a primary amount of his focus in socialization, eating and relaxing, or as we might say today 'just hanging'.

Because the horse spends so much idle time in the paddock, it is prone to become very unpleasant, with the wooden fences being eaten through, a strong smell and muck to walk in. One of the most common ways to handle such dirt is to ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist. It is easy to become accustomed to the dirt of an animal and not see what first time guests might see. This is called denial of the worst kind. However, once reality begins to sink in the next most common approach is to move the paddocks to a less visible area, so the public is not easily exposed to this reality and comes and goes from the horses believing they are really very clean animals. After all if we only see them in nice clean box stalls and on the trails and in the riding arenas then we have every reason to believe that they are low maintenance and naturally clean and inoffensive.

There is an unfortunate parallel between these horses and their dirty paddocks and we humans! Although we can be quick to deny the evident dirt that can accumulate from living, it is readily visible to the outside observer. Our language, manner, and inability to cope with the dirt are impossible to hide forever. So, as in a horse operation we move our dirt to the back of the barn. We work to make a good impression that we are clean animals and therefore dismiss further responsibility. However, like the serious horseman he cannot long ignore the ultimate price tag of indifference toward dirty paddocks, for it spills out in poor condition, unacceptable public presentation, and high maintenance of the animal.

Taking responsibility to have clean paddocks is a difficult assignment. It is likely that we will not address this problem unless the cost of unproductively and inefficient management outweigh the cost of planning and preparations for healthy paddock management. In designing new paddocks at the Ranch, we have had to take into account several major factors. The first includes excavating for easy drainage, the second requires removal of all top soil, so that there is a solid base that stands as the foundation for daily wear and tare. The third is to provide for feed and easy cleanability around the feed and water areas. Additional footing will be necessary. Constant observation of healthy relationship and regular and easy cleanability are also required. In fact, the horses that reside in each paddock will seldom be altered. These horses will graze, perform, and socialize in the same grouping so that their social order will not be disturbed.

In the Old Testament God forced Israel to deal with the realities of a paddock lifestyle by defining those things that qualified them as clean or unclean. There were many situations that made a person unclean; bodily cycles, blemishes, touching the dead, or unhealthy sanitation practices. Israel spent much of its time being aware of its uncleanness. Israel often handled this reality by moving it to the back and forgetting about the need for sacrifices and feasts. However, the deteriorating relationship with their God soon caught up with them and they were forced to deal with the hard realities of living in a world that was easily defiled by sin.

“If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” I John 1:8, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. If you say we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us” I John 1:8 – 10. Obviously, by these verses the answer to our paddock dilemma is not denial, hiding from our problems, nor is it to simply tolerate these realities, moreover it is to confess them and to recognize that they have a continual cost if not owned and addressed. The stains of our paddock lifestyle will soon become visible in our public arenas. For the person who denies these realities one must understand that they are walking according to a lie, deceiving their own selves and living in a world of darkness. For a person who accepts these realities, the scripture says that “everyone who has this hope fixed on Him (and the hope is that we will be made like Him) purifies himself just as He is pure. I John 3:3. In addition I Peter 1:22 states “since you have an obedience to the truth purified your souls for the sincere love of the brethren fervently love one another from the heart”.

How is it that one purifies himself? How is it that we can live with clean paddocks? First we must get down to a solid foundation, our footing for all our daily activities must be based upon the solid foundation of Christ and our worth an identity in Him. Secondly we must realize that our daily activities and needs, for exercise, food, and relationships, both require intake and elimination. Life has its delicacies, and these realities neither make us shameful nor unacceptable. However they do require routine maintenance, preparing our lifestyles in such a way that there is healthy drainage and regular removal of waste. Our bodies are designed so that, while we need constant intake, we are constantly reminded of the need for constant eliminations to stay healthy. So, too, these realities are part of a daily walk with God and with a need for tenderness and forgiveness toward one another. The socializations of our life are the exercises in daily accountability that allow us to live holy and clean lives even in the most non-public places of our lives.

The health and public performance of the animal is often defined by how un-stressful and how uncluttered his life is in his paddocks. The results will be that every serious horseman that sees the animal’s performance will always want to see the way that he is managed and cared for in his paddocks. In the same way, those who have serious hunger for God will want to know what are the secrets to your life of abundance.

-Lew Sterrett