

ASK the Experts

MDers
Want to
Know
about
Pastures

Q: *We are cleaning up old, abandoned dairy pastures for use as horse pastures. The north/north-east side of the pastures bank fairly steeply, down to a marshy area with intermittent streams and then ends at a creek on the south side, which zig-zags the property line. We would like to maximize the useable land and divert the water in the marshy area in order to get more useable pasture. Would creating some sort of drainage pond and directing the water towards the pond be an effective way to do this?*

And who are the best resources for doing a site plan (something that can be handed to a contractor) for water, run-off and a pond: the good folks at soil conservation, or a private site engineering company? And once we have plan in-hand for this, what kind of contractor do we look for? Any type of excavator?

A: The first people to contact would be the Soil Conservation District. They would be able to give you a hand with a wetland determination that should be made before you do work in any "marshy" areas. If there are no regulations against draining your problem area, then the District might be available to do design work for you. Depending on the workload and/or policies of the District you might have to contact a private engineering firm anyway. Without seeing the site, I cannot recommend a practice to drain your area, but a pond is not normally used for drainage. If you have enough of an elevation change, drainage tiles (pipes) might be more appropriate. A pond dug into an area with a high water table will fill with water, but will not lower the water table in the surrounding areas. If that water table is seasonal, the pond might only hold water when the water table is up and leave an unsightly hole in the ground when the water table goes down. If the person running the dairy farm before you took possession of it was a good land manager, the pasture you have available might be as good as it gets. The Soil Conservation District will give you better options. If hiring someone to do your design work, hire them to come up with the solution and not just a design that you think will work. Even if your idea is good, let them take the risk of recommending the appropriate practice. Once you have a set of plans the engineering firm might have a contractors list and the District will definitely have one for you to use.

T. Ray Sufczynski at the Charles County Soil Conservation Office.

Got a Question? Get an Answer! *Equiery* readers can ask questions about their horses or horse farms and a panel of experts with the University of Maryland and Cooperative Extension Services will answer them. **If you would like the panel to answer your question directly, you must e-mail it to Dr. Amy Ordakowski Burk at ao38@umail.umd.edu or Erin Petersen at ep88@umail.umd.edu or, you can fax your question to 410-489-7828 or mail it in to P.O. Box 610, Lisbon, MD 21765, and the questions will be forwarded to the panel, but only e-mailed questions will be answered directly.** Written questions only will be accepted, and select questions may be used for publication in an upcoming *Equiery*.