Ample moisture this winter and early spring makes for a muddy feedlot situation, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln beef cattle specialist says.

Keeping pens clean and cattle dry is critical for cattle producers, said Terry Mader.

“Particularly in eastern Nebraska we have had excessive moisture and a good amount of snow deposited in these yards,” Mader said. “There isn’t a lot you can do but push the snow and mud out and try to get cattle on a solid base.”

Under these conditions, he recommends animals have 250 square feet of pen space per head with 350 or more square feet even better. Smaller areas become muddier quicker and stay muddier longer.

“If you have cattle crowded, that can present some problems. So, if you have an empty pen, use it,” he said. “This will help minimize the depth of the mud.”

Mader said this winter will result in cost of gains being about 10 to 15 percent greater than normal.

When cattle get wet, they get muddy and can carry up to 50 pounds of mud on their coats. Maintenance requirements can double under wet and cold conditions, which for feedlot cattle may result in 10 to 20 more days on feed or being 50 plus pounds lighter when cattle can go to market.

In addition to good pen cleaning, bedding is important.

“If you can use enough to where you can get the animal dry, it can be very beneficial,” Mader said.

His research and research elsewhere shows producers will see benefits from bedding, particularly when it is priced in the $50 to $60 a ton range.

“Instead of having a 15 to 20 percent cost of gain increase, it may only be a 5 to 10 percent increase and that includes the extra bedding and bedding handling cost,” he said.

For more information, visit UNL’s Beef Cattle Production Web site.