



Cattle and Sheep Bedding Materials (Dairy, Beef and Lamb)

Red Tractor are increasingly being asked about the suitability of novel bedding materials, due to the recycling of waste products from different industries into agriculture. Some products are suitable, others suitable under certain conditions¹ – and others not permitted at all.

AHDB produces a more detailed guide on the properties of materials, available here:

<https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/the-bedding-materials-directory>

It is essential that materials used as bedding are Safe, Suitable and Legal. It is essential that they are managed in a way that will keep livestock appropriately clean and consideration is given to the disposal of the product after it has been used as a bedding material, be that spreading to land or inclusion in AD plants. Red Tractor members must keep records of delivery of waste materials intended for bedding. This is important information that may be useful in demonstrating compliance with the law, exemptions and dealing with any problems that may arise with unsuitable loads.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and there are challenges in keeping it up to date. If you are aware of materials not included in this list, that should be please inform dairy@redtractor.org.uk

¹ Some conditions have been set by APHA and Red Tractor



Material	Suitable?	Additional Information
Straw	Yes	Commonly used as a bedding material. It has good thermal properties and moderate absorption.
Sand	Yes	Fine washed sand is recommended as coarser material can be too abrasive. Not recommended for calving/lambing areas.
Untreated wood shavings and sawdust	Can be	Okay from untreated wood only, with a U8 waste exemption to use it as a bedding material. Fine sawdust may contaminate fleeces and is less suitable as sheep bedding.
Paper	Can be	Waste shredded paper and cardboard, dried paper sludges can all be used but a U8 waste exemption is required. Lime ash requires mixing with another material before use as a bedding material.
Untreated Woodchip – clean recycled wood originating from pallets etc.	Can be	Untreated Grade A woodchip that does not contain hazardous substances (i.e. it must be waste classification 03 01 01 or 03 01 05) can be used as bedding material if a U8 waste exemption is held. Ensure it is screened for metal or nails. Doesn't contain MDF, chipboard or panel board. Home-grown wood can also be used, virgin timber is not classed as waste and not subject to waste controls when used for animal bedding.
Treated woodchip	No	Treated, Grade B, C or D woodchip (waste classification 03 01 04) must not be used. These usually include contaminants such as paint, varnish, chemicals and plastics that may pose a threat to the environment. This includes MDF, chipboard and panel board.
Waste gypsum	No	Can be applied to land as a soil conditioner with a waste exemption, but not suitable for livestock bedding.
Virgin gypsum	Yes	Pure, virgin gypsum is suitable. There are safety risks when using it in some housing systems.
Recycled Manure Solids – produced on-farm from own, dairy cows – ENGLAND, WALES and SCOTLAND	Can be	Article 36 of the Regulation (EC) No. 1069/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 laying down health rules as regards animal by-products (ABPs) and derived products not intended for human consumption and repealing Regulation (EC) No. 1774/2002 (the ABP Regulations) enables the use of Recycled Manure Solids (RMS) as animal bedding to the extent that you (as the operator) ensure the control of risks to public and animal health. Defra, the Welsh Government (WG) and the Scottish Government (SG) are of the view that if RMS is used for cattle bedding in accordance with the conditions set out below, there will be no unacceptable risks to public and animal health.



		If you are using RMS as a bedding material you must: • Comply with the RMS Conditions of Use at all times* • Complete an annual self-assessment (using the Red Tractor template available from www.redtractorassurance.org.uk) • Ask your vet to annually review and discuss the use of the material (using the Red Tractor template) • Make the completed template available during your next Red Tractor assessment You must tell us that you are using RMS. Please notify Red Tractor Farmers (email: dairy@redtractor.org.uk, or phone 0203 617 3670) farmers must also notify APHA if they wish to use RMS. Failure to follow these requirements will be a non-conformance against RT standards and may also result in enforcement action being taken by regulatory authorities under the Animal by products regulations.
Recycled Manure Solids –NORTHERN IRELAND	Not currently permitted	
Compost and digestate	Not currently permitted	The spores of certain bacteria, particularly those that are heat resistant may be encouraged by composting. Putting manure through a digester will also increase temperatures, which can affect pathogen load.
Chicken muck	No	Not permitted under the Animal By-products regulations

*https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/585281/guid-ab143.pdf

There are materials that have not been listed. You may need to check their legality and permitted use status- APHA will be able to offer this guidance. You must ensure that where any bedding material causes health and welfare problems, its use is reviewed, and its use stopped (if necessary).

Last updated: July 2026