IMPROVING HOUSING FOR COMFORT AND HEALTH

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Farm Health Planning – Coordinated by the Cattle Health and Welfare Group
Main Unit  265 cows milked 3 x day
2 Systems  (100 cows Home Grown Feeds, 100 cows byproduct Feeds, housed 365 days)
300 young stock at Main unit, housed until they are in calf
Acrehead unit 230 cows milked 3 x day, high yielders housed permanently
All year round calving Whole farm
310 ha 0-40m above sea level, mainly Sandy Loams
NVZ
Grass, Maize , Wheat, Red Clover, Lucerne, Spring Beans
Farm Staff - 6 permanent, 7 contract
For a range of reasons UK dairy cows are spending more time housed.
Question 1: This summer how many of you have been forced to house your cows earlier (fully or in part) than you had planned?

- HAVE HOUSED EARLIER THAN PLANNED
- HAVE BEEN ABLE TO STICK TO YOUR ORIGINAL PLAN
For a range of reasons UK dairy cows are spending more time housed. The housing system can supply the cow’s needs for welfare, health and production. The vet’s role is to inform and challenge the farmer to make necessary building changes and highlight the benefits that would come from that. The farmer has to balance this with what is necessary and cost effective for his business. Can you predict the benefit and how much information do you need?
Reasons to upgrade buildings vary

- Essential maintenance to maintain function
- In response to identified health problems
- Herd expansion and/or ensuring the correct stocking rate
- Grants available
- Tweaks with the aim of maximising health, fertility and production
- Public perception of the industry
- Pride in the farm and a desire to do the best for the cows
Significant reason for poor cow performance

70cm / cow required as a minimum

Webbing strap system simple and has worked well

1kg DM increase in intakes compared to other feed barrier systems on the farm

Smother floor could be another improvement
Water intakes range from 50 – 130 litres / day
Tipper troughs available
Not deep so don’t stagnate
Improved water quality
Reduced abortion risk
Cleaner cut through passages, reduce digital dermatitis risk
Existing cubicle configuration

- 2 row head to head system
- Comfort mattresses used throughout
- Dried sawdust used for bedding 3 times / week
- Occupancy rates good >90%
- Mobility scores, <10% score 2 and <1% score 3.
- Can this be improved?
Question 2: There should be 10% more cubicles than cows. How many farmers are achieving this?

- Yes
- No
New cubicles, higher neck rails, allow front and side lunging and position cows using a brisket board.
Take a cow’s eye view
Improving cubicle comfort

Increasing neck rail height encourages cows to lie down.

Improved rumination, 30 minutes required / Kg DM intake (10 hours), acidosis risk

Reduces lameness risk further

Average lameness cost = £323
Positioning of cows using a brisket board, taking into account the range of cow sizes, reduce the chances of soiling the back of the cubicle beds, soiling noted in no more than 1/10 cubicles
Ventilation varies within the shed

- Air quality variable within the shed
- Adult cow pneumonia cases very low
- No herd IBR vaccination used
- Clinical mastitis rate = 30 cases / 100 cows / year
- Toxic type environmental mastitis common
Pros and cons of increasing inlet ventilation with a wind break and opening the ridge

- Air quality could be improved
- Cows produce 40 litres of slurry and 10 litres of moist air every day
- Moisture on the beds is an issue
- Clinical mastitis rate could be improved
- Cost of clinical mastitis / year = £2700 for cases and £2500 in lost milk per 100 cows
- Concerns over moisture getting in to the shed through the open sides
- Concerns about moisture getting into the shed from the air outlet
- Concerns about draughts at cow level
- Costs of the changes
Question 3: What would you do?

- Increase air inlets area
- Open the ridge
- Both
- Nothing
Conclusions

- The housed environment has a significant impact on the health and welfare of the cattle.
- Vets are not builders or engineers but can highlight areas for improvement within the housing system.
- No decision is straightforward and this presentation has highlighted some of the dialogues that have occurred.
- Farmers need to consider and prioritise the various options in the light of the overall farm business.
Acknowledgements