



DN NEWSLETTER

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As dairy herds increase in size, often health and performance problems occur if the system facilities have not been changed for the herd growth. If the number of cubicles or the feed spaces have not been increased to accommodate for an increase in herd size then the health and performance will suffer. It is not just about the number of spaces, but also cow comfort is key to maximise profits. This newsletter looks at improving profits per slot.

Most dairies only have a limited number of individual cow spaces, also referred to as slots. Production standards implemented by milk buyers insist that we do not have more cows than slots. From a health and performance perspective this makes absolute sense, because we know that cows are healthier when they have their own slot. Especially in situations where the accommodation may not be the best.

To achieve good profitability, it is important that the slots we have available are occupied by healthy, productive cows. Our aim is to sell as much milk as possible from the slots available.

Our standard of what we perceive as a healthy cow needs to change – the blinkers need to come off! Healthy cows do not have dull coats, poor rumen fill, hock lesions, calluses on the neck, overgrown claws, and digital dermatitis. They most certainly do not have transition diseases and the consequences associated with them, such as poor reproductive performance.

Most of these issues are a consequence of the cows environment and the transition management protocols that we apply. We cannot expect to achieve the genetic potential of our cows if we do not keep them in the correct environment. As the old saying goes:

“Genetics loads the gun, Environment pulls the trigger”.

Genetic potential is not achieved for a number of reasons; lameness, lying times, transition and even weight at first calving. These can all reduce the potential milk yield.

The question therefore is, what do we need to do to pull the trigger? Ken Nordlund of Wisconsin University has defined the four main attributes of high performing herds. These include lameness levels below 10%, excellent cow comfort, effective transition and growth rates in heifers up until weaning in excess of 1kg/day. In terms of transition, focus on the 6 key areas which have the biggest influence on transition outcomes. These include feed space, lying space & comfort, grouping strategies & pen moves, lameness and mitigating heat stress.

A large proportion of dairies that fail to achieve a high percentage of the genetic potential of their animals have poor stalls. In reality, and without great expense, a lot can be done to improve the comfort of existing stalls.



One of the easiest wins in to ensure that stall dimensions are correct. If you have poorly set up stalls you will end up with only those cows that are able to adapt to them. Incorrectly positioned neck rails and brisket boards are typically the main offenders, in addition to obstructions in the bob zone.



By far the most important change to make to your stalls is the surface the cows lay on. Deep beds are far superior to mattresses and mats and don't necessarily have to be composed of sand to be successful. A deep bedded system can easily be created by installing a retainer on the heel stone and filling with a combination of straw, lime and water. Comfortable stalls mean cows lay down for longer, lame cows recover quicker and rumen health is improved increased rumination time.

Improving the comfort of the cow and transition management will ensure that you populate your slots with the most profitable cows, and equally important that these cows last for longer and realise a higher lifetime performance.

The objective is to ensure every available space is fit for purpose and houses a healthy, productive cow!

Calf Rearing Zoom Farmer Meeting

Our next farmer meeting, held via zoom, is in conjunction with Cargill and will be focusing on calf rearing.

Registration is essential in order to receive the meeting link and passcode to your inbox on the day of the meeting. You can register for this meeting on the DN website:

dugdalenutrition.com/event-details/calf-rearing



Our Zoom Farmer Meetings run every two weeks. Please visit the **UPCOMING EVENTS** page to see our full online meeting schedule for 2020-21.

DN Foot Health Guide

This guide focuses on preventing, managing and treating bovine lameness, as well as cow comfort.

The Foot Health Guide is available on the **TECHNICAL** area of the DN website.

