

Animal Care and Comfort

Situation Overview:

A. *Can you determine if cow comfort or care was limiting the productivity or profitability of your dairy operation? Yes. If yes, please list animal factor(s) that needed to be improved.* Stall design was a major limiting factor to cow comfort. After construction, we realized that air quality also was limiting cow productivity and profitability. With a new ventilation system, we can move more air through the barn, circulating through fans, which is good for our cows. Sprinklers also can be added to the system, if needed, at a later date.

B. *If you determined that cow comfort or care was a limiting factor, did you make structural and/or management changes to address the deficiencies? Yes. Please list structural and/or management changes.* We used Penn State University numbers for stall size. Upon first moving into the new barn, we adjusted the brisket pipe.

The cows are cleaner in the new barn. Their tails are up under them, not in the alley way. The barn features a tube gutter. The chain is out of site, with no cables, which leads to less cable damage to cows' hooves.

C. *Relative to animal care, what have you learned from this project that you believe would have broad application to the dairy industry? What would you do the same and what would you do differently?* We have moved the solid neck rail pipe forward to maintain strength/support of the loop stall while adding a yellow tie down strap where the pipe was originally installed. We observed that cows would stand up and hit the pipe near the point of shoulder. We also noticed cows would end up too far front in the stall, or for some reason have trouble getting up, resulting in hurting the cows' topline/back. After seeing a cow temporarily stuck and seeing a photo in *Hoard's Dairyman*, we implemented the strap. It still keeps the cows standing back far enough in the stall, but is also flexible in a way that is not hard on the cows' shoulder/back/topline.

D. *What is your farm's approach to administration and documentation around the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for animal care?* We have a verbal checklist, but know that we need to work on written SOPs, especially for people who may help with barn chores. In April 2013, through Ag Vet Associates and a grant through Beef Quality Assurance program, we participated in a SOP workshop which provided templates to establish SOPs for our farm. Good record keeping and a written checklist for anyone helping out while we are away, will help assure that we continue to provide a safe product for consumers.

E. *Have you enrolled in a formal animal care program? Yes. If so, what have you learned that's been beneficial to your operation?* To date, any efforts in an animal care program have been led by our cooperative, Mount Joy Farmer's Cooperative, and local vet practice. The animal care program focuses on the following areas: (1) nutrition, (2) animal health, (3) environment and facilities, and (4) handling, movement, and transportation.

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F. *What is the vision for animal care at Stoney Path Farm?* We believe that our cows should be cared for with the utmost respect and follow the quote of W.B. Hoard about “treating them like a mother.” The cows in a robotic system are very calm because they can do everything they need to do (eat, drink, milk, walk, lie down, scratch their back and socialize with herd mates) and can do it on their own schedule. Through data from the system and personal observation and interaction, we strive to stay ahead of any problem hindering a cow’s performance. A happy healthy cow is a more productive cow, resulting in more milk sold from our farm.

