

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? If yes, please list animal factor(s) that needed to be improved.* Stall size was a limiting factor, and cows per stall equated to an overcrowded facility. The cows were standing on concrete longer than we wanted because of the time it was taking to milk the entire herd. That affected the foot health (lameness) which also hurt productivity. Access to bunk space was also limited for the cows, which decreased feed intake.

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? Please list structural and/or management changes.* With the new barn, the cows are not on concrete as long. There are sprinklers for summer cooling. Bedding with manure solids is better for cow comfort too. Cow flow also is improved and they are no longer standing in line too long to be milked.

We added fans and curtains that along with the sprinklers, are controlled by an automatic sensor. A cattle brush was installed in each pen, which is constantly being used by the cows.

Rubber belting was installed where the cows stand to eat. We added a permanent foot bath so that the cows use it more often, which contributes to improved foot health. Stall design and size has encouraged the cows to want to use them. We use deep bedding with manure solids which also increases stall usage and cow comfort.

Another project feature is a bed-pack barn, which was added to house up to 25 cows with special needs.

C. *What did you learn that would be of interest to the broader dairy community?* We have learned in a new way how cow comfort yields increased milk production. Production increased even greater than what we were anticipating when we started the project.

D. *What is your farm's approach to administration and documentation around the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for animal care?* There are no written SOPs, but they are verbally communicated to all employees. Our philosophy is to treat our cows respectfully and humanely. They are our livelihood, and for the cows to take care of us, we must take care of the cows. Working closely with our veterinarian also provides a solid sounding board on animal care issues.

E. *Have you enrolled in a formal animal care program? If so, what have you learned that's been beneficial to your operation?* Yes. We are enrolled in the Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) program.

