

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.* Mattresses were worn out in the tie-stall barn and there was not enough room for additional cattle in the existing pole building, which also had poor ventilation. Air flow restrictions also limited hot-weather cooling in the tie-stall barn.
- 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.* We replaced mattresses in our tie-stall barn and added 24-inch circulating fans over stalls. We also retro-fitted the pole barn with 30 sand-bedded free stalls and a sidewall curtain, as part of the Transformation Team project. We also grooved smooth concrete areas to improve cattle footing in the barn.
- C. *What did you learn that would be of interest to the broader dairy community?* We learned to talk to fellow dairy farmers and industry people to gather a wide range of ideas before beginning a project. If a project requires hiring a contractor, be sure to review the plans in detail before the project begins, making sure there are no assumptions and you've explained everything you want in the finished project.
- D. *What is your farm's approach to administration and documentation around the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for animal care?* All workers know how to groom stalls. Bedding of sand is done weekly, while shavings are added daily in the tie stall barn. Everyone works together to provide a calm and relaxing atmosphere for the cattle.
- E. *Have you enrolled in a formal animal care program? If so, what have you learned that's been beneficial to your operation?* No. Our milk buyer has not required a formal program, as our management practices represent optimum animal care standards.
- F. *What is your vision for animal care?* Our vision is that cows have a clean, comfortable place for laying available to them at all times (certainly at least the 20 hours recommended by experts). Also, that there is abundant bunk space and water is less than 50 feet from all stalls. We seek to maximize natural ventilation with curtains while providing fans to move air as necessary. The younger animals are penned so they are not crowded and can grow properly. All animals over one year of age have pasture access at least eight months of the year. We feel it is important to move cows off of the concrete, allowing them exercise for their feet and legs and to promote longevity.