

Telani May 6 2010

Lying down on the job good for cows

COW comfort is the latest buzz word in the dairy world and what it largely comes down to in Australia's warming climate, and as production shifts towards feed-pads, is keeping cows cool and getting them off their feet.

International animal health experts and nutritionists said current research pointed to big dollar advantages for producers who paid attention to things like lameness, the amount of time a cow rested and heat stress.

Cow time budgets, developed by the United State's Miner Agricultural Institute at New York, recommend 12 to 14 hours a day of lying down.

Dr Karl Burgi from the Dairy-land Hoof Care Institute in Wisconsin, US, told the recent Australian dairy conference that was critical to addressing a growing

lameness problem in Australian herds.

Up to 60 per cent of cows were affected by lameness annually, he said, and considering that in a 500-head herd lameness at just 25pc could cost a producer about US\$50,500 a year, it was a big issue.

Per case, lameness was costing producers about \$US400, taking into account lost milk production, culling and treatment.

Most lameness was caused by trauma, primarily white line lesions and toe ulcers, he said, and the solution often lay in reducing the time cows were forced to be standing, especially on concrete.

Dr Burgi said dairy cows had a strong behavioural need to rest and "standing around" was not natural.

"They should be either harvesting feed or laying down," he said.

"A comfortable cow equals higher yields. Research indicates 1.5 litres of extra milk for each extra hour of lying down per day."

As Australia's dairy production moved towards total and partial mixed ration systems, with feed presented to cows at fence line

feeders or feed bunks requiring standing for extended hours, getting cow time budgets spot on was becoming very important, Dr Burgi said.

Exacerbating the incidence of lameness was the fact milking in Australia was still largely performed on a whole herd basis and the bigger

components that "saved the farm" for US producers hit by the global economic downturn in 2009.

Cow comfort was extra important during heat stress and the trick was "allowing cows to be cows."

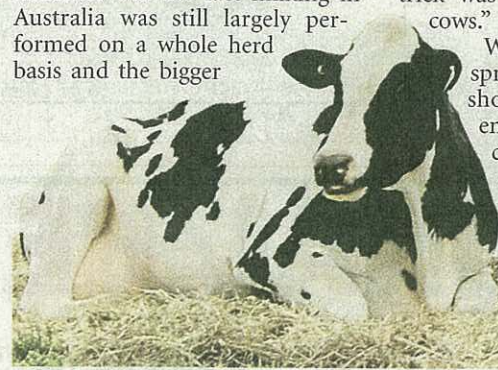
While cooling systems, sprinklers, fans and shades should be in place, he emphasised the value of a clean, accessible and ample supply of water as the "cheapest and most important factor for maintaining milk production and health during heat stress".

"One of my clients instituted a daily water trough cleaning routine which resulted in an immediate 1.5- to two-pound milk response," he said.

Producers should also be careful not to overfeed protein as excess protein generates more heat.

However, heat-stressed cattle have an extra need for potassium and glucose.

- SHAN GOODWIN



herds meant more time standing in dairies, he said.

Research had also shown cows stood up to three hours longer per day during hot weather - hot cows never laid down as they needed cool air circulating around them, Dr Burgi said.

US nutritionist, Rick Lundquist, said effective management of heat stress was one of the key

Cow Time Budget

Lying down/resting:	12 to 14 hours
Eating:	five to 5.5 hours
Drinking:	30 minutes
Standing or walking:	two to three hours
Milking:	2.5 to 3.5 hours



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