

# Milking Parlor Smorgasbord

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a dairy operation must be considered because it will be affected by a change in an existing milking parlor or a conversion from a stanchion and pipeline setup to parlor.

Robert Engle, a farm systems engineer with Agway Inc., provided a cost comparison guide showing price ranges, not necessarily those offered by any one company, and how they related to other costs of operation, the size of the parlors and the size of the herd.

According to the table, the most inexpensive operation (on a basis of the cost-per-cow needed to pay back equipment, housing and labor) is a double-10, all-exit parlor with one operator milking 400 cows. The next inexpensive on the same basis was a double-16 all-exit parlor with two people milking 600 cows.

However, the table Engle provided was only designed to provide a model for what kind of costs might be incurred.

The pannel of dairymen included Tim Fessenden, from King Ferry, N.Y.; Cliff Sweigart,

Elizabethtown; and Stan Weeks, with Agway's Farm Management Research station farm.

Fessenden has a rapid exit parallel system. He used to have a double-five herringbone and 100 cows. He said that when checking out the number of cows he would need to pay off a new system he would need to milk 300 cows.

In the summer of 1989 he started construction on the parallel system.

In the months that he has had it, Fessenden said he can milk 80 cows an hour if everything is perfect. He has a 270-head milking herd and it takes him about 3½ hours to do a milking.

But because he has his herd broken into four different milking groups he isn't getting maximum efficiency. He said each group takes less than an hour to milk.

The prevailing thought offered during the seminar in parlor design is to have good ventilation, and wide, non-imposing entrances and exits for the cows.

Fessenden said he had a lot of natural lighting built into his parlor mostly for the benefit of those

working there and to also add cross ventilation.

He has a sloped pit under a slatted floor in the holding area and parlor.

The only change he would make is to improve the ventilation of the sub-floor pit during construction. He said he is in the process of making improvements now.

Clifford Sweigart, of Ridgeview Farms in Elizabethtown, has 146 free stalls and double-six herringbone parlor with extra room built to allow for possible expansion to a double-eight.

"Cow flow is a priority in almost all systems," he said.

His parlor was finished in February. "We've been in it for the past 10 months and we're extremely happy."

He has meters at each milking station, but they have yet to be linked to a main computer, he said. The floor in the holding area is double-grooved. "If I had it to do over, I'd do it in slats and would have used a flush system," he said.

He also recommended using tile on the walls. He said tiles were in the old parlor he replaced and, aside from a few chips in the tile, the building was in perfect shape after years of use.

He has a return alley for cows that require special treatment, an indexing rail the pushes back to get the cows back against the splash guards and "There are no turns. They go out into an 11 foot by 20 foot surge area."

A directional gate used to divert certain cows is rigged so that a man in the milking pit can operate it from there.

He said, however, to take time and really think out the whole system before starting any construction or financing. In effect, he suggested that someone contemplating going with constructing a parlor should attempt to customize it as much as possible in the planning stages.

"Anything you can add for convenience will be an added plus," Sweigart said.

Stan Weeks, farm system engineer, said that Agway people planned for six months when they decided to make some changes at their research station, located about 15 miles south of Syracuse, N.Y.

He said the goal for the new parlor was to go to three-times a day milking with one person and keep

the location the same.

As an aside, he said the Agway herd has a rolling average of 22,500 pounds of milk.

What was built was a well-lighted, double-eight rapid exit herringbone parlor. The entire building was widened from 36-feet to 72-feet, natural ventilation was used in all areas for almost all months of the year. Sliding doors that open into a large surge area allow for a quick cow exit and turn-around.

The research parlor has a 16-foot ceiling because of an observation area that is built above the the parlor pit.

In the winter, the air is heated with natural gas and blowers. He said they use about a 100 gallons per winter.

The milking rate there is 64 cows an hour.

The entire situation is not ideal, however, because the have 60 freestalls, 120 tie stalls and the rest of the herd in a research laboratory situation.

The parlor does have automatic identification system and milk weighing with a holder to keep accuracy within two percent.

The parlor was a prototype for one that is now commercially available.

It also has a pneumatic indexing rail that he said he was wary of because it appeared that cows might jump and be injured. However, it has not happened.

He also said rapid exiting is important to get turn around on use of the parlor. He said it takes eight seconds to clear the stalls.

The only change he would make  
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