

Keep Cool Cows

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Whether you have 20 cows or 2,000, your herd needs help staying comfortable in hot weather. Minimizing heat gain and helping cows lose excess heat can keep them comfortable and productive, says an animal housing expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Cows like temperatures on the cool side," said Dr. Robert Graves, professor of agricultural engineering. "When temperatures exceed 75 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit, dairy cows should be provided with shade, extra air exchange and water.

"Look for early signs of heat discomfort and take action before it affects production," said Graves. "Are cows breathing faster? Is the line at the water trough getting longer? Is feed consumption slipping? Are cows standing around instead of lying down and ruminating?"

If your cows are overheated, you may need to make adjustments to your facilities.

"The milking parlor holding area, feeding areas and resting areas all should receive attention," Graves said. "Holding areas are especially critical. Do not keep cows in hot, crowded holding areas for more than one hour."

Shade is vital. "Well-ventilated barns, pastures with trees or shade structures all can provide protection from hot summer sun," Graves said. "Buildings used for winter shelter also can provide summer shade."

Air exchange and movement also is important.

"Air flowing over a cow will carry away the heat lost from her

body and hot, moist air expelled from her mouth," Graves said. "Removing barn sidewalls and endwalls or providing extra exhaust fans will replace hot, moist air with fresh outside air."

Cows need a lot of water in the summer, so help them get their fill easily and conveniently.

"Cows easily can consume twice as much water during hot weather, so place extra water troughs around the barn," Graves said. "Cows particularly seem to enjoy a long, cool drink right after leaving the milking parlor."

Long periods of hot weather require additional measures. "Sprinkle cows with water then let them dry off," Graves said. "The evaporating moisture removes large amounts of heat from the cows and cooling continues while their haircoat dries."

Use a low-pressure nozzle that delivers 0.5 to 1.0 gallons per minute in large droplets.

"Fine mists will not penetrate the haircoat and may blow away before reaching the cows," Graves said. "Nozzles can be spaced along the feed line to wet cows' backs while they are eating. Automatic controls can turn the water on when the temperature exceeds 78 degrees, and then cycle it off and on until the temperature cools. Fans should be turned on when the temperature reaches 75 degrees."




High-pressure fan foggers continuously spray water into the air of a fan. As the water evaporates, it moistens the air and cools cows.

Keep your cows comfortable, but don't go overboard. "Operating cooling systems when they're not needed can chill cows," Graves said.

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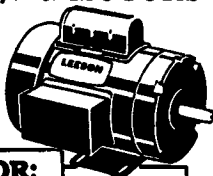
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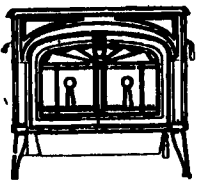


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