

Producer Believes Mattresses Keep Cows Cool, Comfortable, Productive

ANDY ANDREWS
Lancaster Farming Staff
COCHRANVILLE (Chester Co.) — Can cows be too comfortable?

Sometimes, stall mattresses are so comfortable that the cows don't even want to leave the barn.

Just ask dairyman Tim Barlow of Pinta Lane Farm Holsteins.

Mattresses installed in January of 1995 help the cows so much that sometimes, Barlow said, "we can't get the cows out of the barn."

Cow comfort has proven to be a big factor in milk production. The more comfortable you make a cow, dairy experts agree, the more healthy it will be — and the more milk it can produce.

Barlow, who farms with wife Phyllis and children Angela, 12; Krystal, 10; and Steven, 8, in addition to hired help, noted that using the mattresses contributes to a long list of items that have helped him achieve high milk production on his Chester County farm.

Barlow said it was a combination of "good cows, good feed, and good herd health," along with genetics, that helped him achieve a herd average on DHIA of 24,000 pounds.

Another big factor in cow comfort in the barn is the tunnel ventilation installed in the spring of 1995, a pivotal year for improvements. The tunnel ventilation draws fresh, cool air through the stalls.

Barlow maintains about 400 acres, including 200 acres of corn, 100 of soybeans, 60 of alfalfa, and 40 acres of small grains (wheat and barley) at the farmland owned by Ben Beiler.

Barlow also employs hired help at the farm, including herdsman Mike Pratt and part-time help from Ken Shivery and Milton Edwards.

The Barlows care for 90 registered Holsteins along with 90 heifers.

In January 1995 Barlow installed 78 cow mattresses filled with chipped car tires and sneakers at a cost of \$5,000. The mattresses were made in Canada.

Barlow insists that the mattresses have gone a long way to improve herd health and, consequently, herd average.

"If I had to put them in every year, I'd do it," he said.

The mattresses, laid in individual tiestalls, include a top cover of straw to allow even more comfort and as further protection to the covers. The outside of the mattresses is made up of a tough, resilient nylon that sheds water and other material. The rubber pieces are contained in a cloth material underneath the tough, sturdy nylon.

The only challenges Barlow faces with using the mattresses is potential for tears or rips in the mattress. Water can seep in and cause real problems, he said. Cost to replace each mattress is \$70.

Barlow, who has been dairying for 25 years, believes too many dairy farmers are concerned with spending a lot of money on bedding but don't believe mattresses are worth the investment.

But the mattresses provide a softer, cooler environment for cows. And when cows are relaxed, they create more milk.

Barlow also makes use of a TMR by a nutritionist.

Farm responsibilities are shared by the whole family. Tim's wife Phyllis keeps the books. Angela Barlow, 12, is in the seventh grade in the Oxford school district and

helps with a wide range of barn chores. Krystal, 10, in the fifth grade, helps with calf feeding along with Steven, 8, in the third grade.

Full-time help is provided by Mike Pratt, herdsman, and part-time help from Ken Shivery. Ken helps mostly with odd jobs, said Barlow. Milton Edwards, a retired

dairy farmer, helps with crop work.

Tim Barlow began working for Ben Beiler about 25 years ago.

For a number of years, Barlow was in partnership on the farm with Beiler. Then, in 1988, Barlow purchased the business and rents the land from Beiler.



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In the early summer, Tim Barlow, standing, far left, was cutting and baling barley straw with help from family and friends. In front with Tim are his wife Phyllis and hired man, Ken Shivery. In back are, from left, Krystal Barlow, Mike Pratt's daughter Nichole, and Angela and Steven Barlow.

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