

Freestall And Bedding Management Discussed At Recent Conference

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freestall and bedding choices. "You have to make choices," said Stowell. "You need to assure cleanliness, optimal provide cow comfort, and make considerations for your manure system."

The panel identified eight feet as the minimum amount of space needed in a stall to allow for cow movement, emphasizing that a lunging area was needed to allow the cow to lunge forward. The standard width of a freestall should be 48 inches for a mature Holstein cow.

The brisket board should allow the cow to stand comfortably, but discourage forward movement and encourage the animal to lie square. Animals that don't lie square are more susceptible to dirty udders and udder injuries.

According to McFarland, the freestall design should do four things — be comfort, promote cleanliness, promote good udder health, and prevent injury. Cows should spend 10 to 14 hours a day lying down. And they should do that in about six bouts during the day.

"Cows are going to lie down anyway they can to get up easily," said McFarland. "Most people buy bedding based on whatever is most plentiful and whatever is least expensive. But nobody ever went broke buying bedding."

The panel emphasized that the general requirements for freestalls are clean, dry, and comfortable. Cleanliness is promoted by using inorganic material such as sand and cleaning the stalls regularly. Cow comfort is promoted by using soft bedding at least four to eight inches

thick.

During the session, Rodenburg went over a study of different types of bedding and their impact on cow comfort. The study showed that softer areas promoted ease of movement, which stimulated more up and down movement and more frequent trips to the manager.

While the research showed that the cows like lying down on mattresses, the difference in the time cows spent lying down in sand-bedded stalls and the time they spent lying in stalls with mattresses was minimal. Sand bedded cows also had less hock injuries.

The panel agreed that sand was the most ideal type of bedding. It does double duty, providing a cushioning layer and a clean, dry, and giving surface.

The negative aspect of sands was its impact on manure systems. Stalls that use sand should have eight inches of sand in the resting area, should accommodate the brisket board, and should include a 4 percent slope.

For planning estimates, a farmer should allow for five cubic yards per stall per year and 40 pounds of sand per stall per day.

Although the speakers did feel sand was the most appropriate choice of bedding, they cautioned that it was not a cure all.

Proper design and maintenance were essential. The stalls should be cleaned three times a day. They also recommended that sand should be washed, graded, and allowed to dry before it is used in the stalls.

According to Smith, the reasons a farmer should worry about bedding material and its impact on herd health is because the bedding material has frequent contact with the teat end.

Inorganic material such as sand encourages less environmental bacteria like coliform. In research studies, organic bedded cows always have more clinical mastitis, which is often caused by environmental pathogens.

These bacteria need food, moisture, and heat. The organic bedding like sawdust or straw provides the food, while moisture and heat are often readily available, especially in the summertime.

Smith gave these management recommendations for farmers who want to use organic bedding. It must be very dry, should be replaced often, and should include the additional of lime or chemicals to inhibit bacteria growth.

This is just some of the information that these speakers discussed during the freestall and bedding management session of the Dairy Housing Conference.

The Conference was sponsored by the Natural Resource and Agriculture Engineering Service (NRAES), a branch of extension funded by fourteen landgrant universities. NRAES sponsored the conference based on suggestions from dairy farmers and researchers.



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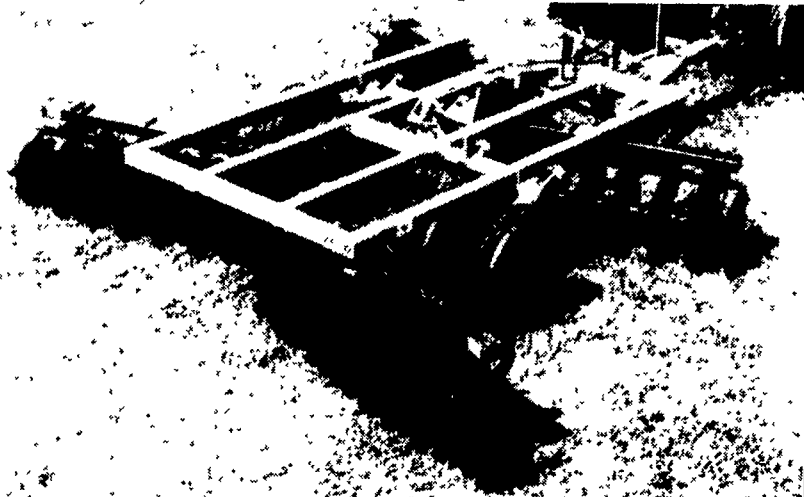
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