



Providing loafing areas for dairy cattle



Are loafing areas beneficial for dairy cattle?

The Challenge

There has been a great deal of public interest in continuously housed dairy cows. The use of 'loafing' or exercise areas outside the main cow housing was proposed as a way of better meeting animal needs. The challenge is to understand whether it allows cows to better express natural behaviour, what type of loafing area works best, and if there is a performance benefit.



Providing feed or 'furniture' such as grooming brushes increased the use of loafing areas.

The Research

A series of experiments were carried out at SRUC's Dairy Research and Innovation Centre. The aims were to assess factors affecting cow use of outdoor loafing areas. Cows were housed indoors and were given access to different types of loafing areas in different experiments.

Loafing areas also provide a better space for cows to express oestrus behaviour and for lower-ranking cows to escape dominants.

The Impact

There was no impact of providing loafing areas on milk yield but they can improve cow welfare.

The Results

Cows generally prioritise feeding indoors over moving outdoors to use a loafing area. However, when a field was offered as a loafing area, cows in cubicle housing used it extensively during the day, mostly to lie down. Cows did not use loafing areas during rain or use fields when there was lying water. Concrete loafing areas were used less, but cows used the areas to cool down on hotter or humid days or warm up on dry, sunny winter days.

Field loafing areas must be managed to avoid poaching and waterlogging, but they provide cows with good resting areas. Loafing areas give cows more space to show oestrus behaviour, escape bullying and to cool down or heat up.

Project Detail

Project start date: [07/2008], **finish date:** [08/2013].

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Further reading - Full report to Defra at <http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk>. Search AW1026.

Haskell et al., 2013. The effect of a view to the surroundings and microclimate variables on use of a loafing area in housed dairy cattle. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 147: 28-33.

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Further Information

Getting it right will be highly important to the success of your business.

If you would like more information contact your local consultant or SAC Consulting Dairy Specialist at **dairy@sac.co.uk**