

Improving cow comfort to increase longevity in Canadian dairy herds

J. Gibbons¹†, E. Vasseur², D. Pellerin³, D. Haley⁴, D. F. Kelton⁴, K. Orsel⁵, H. W. Barkema⁵, E. Pajor⁵, D. Lefebvre⁶, D. Weary⁷, M. A. G. vonKeyserlingk⁷, J. Rushen¹, A. M. de Passillé¹.

¹Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Agassiz, BC, Canada, V0M 1A0; ²Organic Dairy Research Center, University of Guelph, Alfred, ON, Canada, K0B 1A0; ³Department of Animal Sciences, Laval University, Quebec, QC, Canada, G1K 7P4; ⁴Department of Population Medicine, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada, N1G 2W1; ⁵Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada, T2N 4N1; ⁶Valacta, Quebec, QC, Canada, H9X 3R4, ⁷University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6T 1Z4.

†Email: jenny.gibbons@hotmail.co.uk

The environmental impact of dairy production is reduced when the longevity of each cow and the efficiency of milk production are high. Lameness and injuries have a negative impact on the cow's productivity and longevity, thereby reducing the overall efficiency of dairy production. Many recommendations are now available to Canadian producers about good facility design and management but there is a lack of information about the extent that these recommendations are being followed or about the extent that they are able to contribute to increased cow longevity. Furthermore, there is a need for a tool to transfer knowledge about facility design and management to producers to help make improvements.

Our main objective is to identify the most important risk factors on Canadian dairy farms that lead to poor cow comfort and welfare and reduced longevity. We will take data from 240 tie-stall and free-stall dairy farms in Alberta, Quebec and Ontario differing in average cow longevity. We will measure aspects of the stall, flooring and feeder design and management, take measures of lameness and injury prevalence and measure lying time. These measures will be used to develop an advisory tool to help producers improve their practices, where this is needed to increase cow longevity.

Implications: Provide an intervention tool that aid producers adopt practices and technology to improve cow comfort and longevity.