Re-Evaluating Diagnostic Tool Observing Cow Longevity and Lameness after Management Changes in Dairy Barns

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Lameness is a significant health problem within the dairy industry that has a negative impact on both farm economics and animal welfare. The environment that dairy cows are in can have a large impact on the prevalence of lameness and quality of cow comfort on farms. To better understand how the environment effects dairy cows, an evidence-based tool was created in 2011 to help assess cow comfort, lameness, and longevity in a uniform manner on free-stall facilities across Canada. A study was conducted to validate this tool, and to obtain baseline data for lameness, cow comfort, and longevity on Canadian free-stall dairy farms. The results of this study were shared with participating dairy farmers, and areas for facility and management improvement were discussed. The University of Calgary was involved in this nation wide study, and evaluated 90 dairy farms in Alberta. The aim of the current study is to contact the farms within Alberta that participated previously and use the same tool to re-evaluate these farms. The study will include farms that were exposed to the tool and have made changes based on their results from the previous study, farms that were exposed to the tool and did not make changes to their facility, as well as farms that have not yet been exposed to the tool. This will allow quantifying cow comfort, lameness, and longevity while also evaluating the impact of management changes that were implemented on the studied parameters.

With an evidence-based tool that quantifies the impact of both facility and management changes on farm, farmers will be better able to decide which changes will best suit their dairy operation.