

Re-evaluation of Cow Comfort, Cow Longevity, and Lameness after Management Changes in Dairy Barns in Alberta

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Cow comfort is a key component to maintaining animal welfare, decreasing lameness, and increasing longevity. In 2011, a set of standard operating procedures (SOPs) was developed and utilized to obtain an understanding of cow comfort on Canadian freestall dairy barns. The SOPs included both farm measurements (barn dimensions, stall dimensions, bedding type, bedding depth, and barn cleanliness) and cow measurements (cow cleanliness, injury scores, lameness scores, and lying time). The outcomes of each SOP were converted into a score, which highlighted areas that could improve cow comfort. The results of this study provided producers with benchmarked data on comfort management in regards to the Canadian Dairy Code of Practice, as well as other participating farms. The aim of the current study (2015) is to understand if making changes to freestalls has an impact on cow comfort as measured with the scores produced by the SOPs. In order to accomplish this, 3 groups of farms were identified. Group 1 consisted of farms that made changes to freestalls between 2011 and 2015 (n=15). Group 2 was composed of farms that did not make any changes, or made changes to areas not related to the freestalls between 2011 and 2015 (n=15). Group 3 included farms that did not participate in the 2011 study, and were not exposed to benchmarked data (n=14).

Results: The data were collected on all of the 44 participating farms between April and December of 2015. Data are currently being analyzed, and results will be available by March, 2016.

Implications: Analyses between these groups will allow for quantification of certain facility changes, and also give insight on how scores produced by the SOPs have changed over the past several years.