

North Star Veterinary Services Newsletter

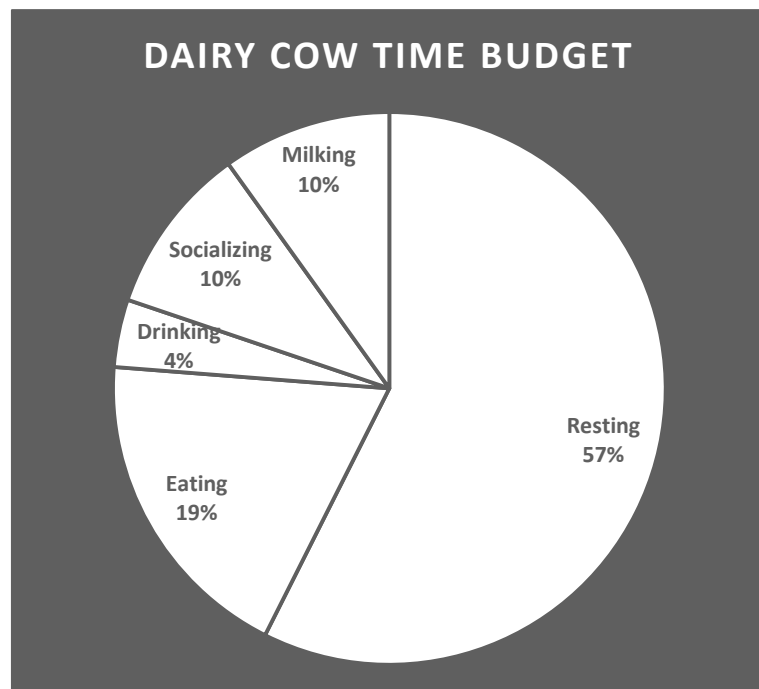
September 2019

Cow Comfort

“**Cow comfort**” is a broad term with a lot of importance on a dairy farm. No matter what type of facility your milking cows live in, optimizing their comfort and meeting their needs drives profitability and success on the dairy. In this month’s newsletter we will highlight some simple concepts to help guide how you think about your cattle’s comfort in order to help you identify areas that you may have the opportunity to improve on your farm.

It helps to think about a cow’s day broken up into her 5 main actions- resting, eating, drinking, socializing, and being milked. For the typical dairy cow, there are actually guidelines for how much of her day she should be spending doing each of these things. The ideal way she is supposed to spend her day is as follows:

Action	Time (Hours)
Resting	13-15
Eating	4-5
Drinking	0.5-1
Socializing	2-3
Milking	2-3



The reason we try to provide the facilities and management that allow for a cow’s day to look like this is that this situation allows for optimal milk production. For example, you can see that the majority of a cow’s day should be spent “resting”, specifically laying down (sounds like a pretty good life to me!). This is an important thing for her to do because blood flow to the udder is significantly increased when the cow is laying down, compared to when she is standing. Increased blood flow to the udder results in increased milk production. In fact, studies show that every hour a cow spends resting >10 hrs/day typically results in a 2-3lb/milk/day increase for that cow. What that means is that it PAYS to have comfortable stalls or areas for your cows to rest.

When contacting North Star call 518-483-6223

North Star Veterinary Services Newsletter

There are many types of facilities that can adequately provide a comfortable place for a cow to lay. Whether you are a free stall with deep sand bedding, a tie stall, or a bedded pack barn, cow comfort comes down to how your facilities are managed. Some general tips for keeping cows comfortable are:

- 4 inches bedding minimum in a stall
- Bedding should be clean, dry, and evenly spread
- Mattresses if used should be in good condition and replaced when worn
- Stalls should be an appropriate size for your cows

This is such an important concept, that on some farms consultants will set up a time-lapse cameras to evaluate exactly how many hours a day cows are spending laying down. If you don't have a time-lapse camera, there are lots of things that can help indicate that cow comfort may be an issue resulting in decreased time resting and therefor decreased milk production. Some things that may indicate a problem are:

- Hock lesions
- Lameness
- Cows avoiding certain stalls or areas of a barn
- Cows with back legs outside of a stall (when standing or laying)
- Cows laying in alley

If you are noticing any of these issues, it may be time to assess cow comfort. Remember comfortable cows produce more milk, so adding more bedding or investing in new mattresses will likely pay off in the long run.

After resting, a cow should spend the next greatest amount of time eating. It is important that every cow has the chance to spend 4-5 hours a day eating high quality feed. Remember, for every 11lb of dry matter of feed, a cow will produce 2-3 lbs of milk. In a free stall, in order for a cow to spend that much time in her day eating, the following needs to be achieved:

- High quality feed available 24hr/day every day (20hr/day minimum)
- Adequate space at the feed bunk for all cows
- Easy to clean feed bunk
- Ability to eat comfortably from it in the "head-down" position (sores on top of neck may indicate a problem with this)
- Feed should be frequently pushed up- 1 hour post-feeding and then 3-4 hours as needed

Next on her agenda? Drinking. For every 11lb of milk a cow produces, she needs 2 lbs of water! Therefore it is important to have large amounts of clean water available to cows at all times. In order to make sure cows are getting enough water, abide by these guidelines:

- 30-50% of their daily drinking occurs after milking and after eating, so strategically place waterers in the areas they are in at these times
- >2 waterers/pen
- Water depth should be >3 inches
- Water space should be >3 linear inches/cow OR >3 perimeter inches for 10-15 cows
- Waterers should be cleaned daily

Overall, good facilities and more importantly good management of your facilities will help you achieve the best cow comfort and in the end help your cows live up to their full potential!

When contacting North Star call 518-483-6223