

The impact of tie stall facilities on dairy cattle welfare and the broader United States dairy industry

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Introduction

Standard operating procedures and recommended practices on dairy farms are constantly evolving, driven by measurable animal welfare outcomes and societal pressures about what is acceptable by customers and consumers.

Aim

The objective was to examine U.S. dairy farm demographics, animal welfare outcomes, and best management practices (BMP) for tie stalls facilities. Additionally, a comparison of animal welfare outcomes for tie stall facilities to other housing systems was conducted as well as the economic and societal impact of tie stall facilities.

Methods

In 2016, the U.S. dairy industry was presented with customer concern about tie stalls facilities due to the potential to limit freedom of movement. The National Dairy FARM Animal Care Program, administered by National Milk Producers Federation, developed a task force to address the concern, as well as to develop BMP for tie stalls facilities. A literature review was conducted to evaluate current tie stall design and reported rates of welfare indicators.

Results

Tie stall facilities implementing BMPs provide equal opportunities of sound welfare for lactating dairy cattle compared to those housed in other facility types. Animal morbidity, mortality, BCS, hygiene, and locomotion score of 1 are similar in tie stall and freestall systems. Tie stalls tend to have a greater percentage of cows with a hock & knee score and hygiene score of 3. Approximately 50% of all tie stall facilities are operated by a plain sect community member representing more than 9,000 dairy farms with 21,000 employees.

Conclusion

More research is needed to evaluate the welfare of cows that are housed in tie stalls and compare these values to those in other housing systems. Results of this analysis will be used to enhance the BMP of the sector of the United States dairy industry that manages dairy cattle in tie stall facilities.