

**Dairy cows:
steps needed to improve welfare**

Peter Stevenson
Compassion in World Farming

Zero-grazing

- Many cows kept indoors all year – or almost all year
- CIWF dairy investigation 2012 visited 52 farms in Germany, Denmark & Spain
- Over 50% keep cows indoors all year



An experience denied to many of Europe's dairy cows



EFSA: “If dairy cows are not kept on pasture for parts of the year, i.e. they are permanently on a zero-grazing system, there is an increased risk of lameness, hoof problems, teat tramp, mastitis, metritis, dystocia, ketosis, retained placenta and some bacterial infections”



EFSA high priority recommendation: “When possible, dairy cows and heifers should be given access to well managed pasture or other suitable outdoor conditions, at least during summer time or dry weather”

Tie stalls: tethering of dairy cows

- In some Member States including Germany many cows are tethered indoors for most or all of year – sometimes tethered like this 24 hours a day all year round
- Unable to move other than to lie down & stand up and take a few steps backwards, forwards & sideways



**Tethering systems
should be prohibited**

Health problems associated with high milk yields



- Beef cow will produce around 1,000 litres of milk for her calf during her 10 month lactation
- Many dairy cows have been pushed through genetic selection to yield of around 6,000–8,000 litres per annum
- For some yield is 10,000 or more litres per annum

Pressures on these high yielding cows are so great that many are utterly worn out after just three or four milk cycles and are prematurely culled



EFSA: “Long term genetic selection for high milk yield is the major factor causing poor welfare, in particular health problems, in dairy cows”

Lameness

- EFSA: foot & leg disorders a major welfare problem for dairy cows
- Incidence of lameness: 25-30% on many farms
- EFSA: no reduction in prevalence of lameness in last 20 years
- EFSA: Most lame cows are in pain & have greater difficulty in coping with their living conditions than non-lame cows because of the effects of the foot or leg disorder on walking, lying comfort, standing up & avoidance behaviour.

Inadequate housing: conditions often poor

Barren, overcrowded, often filthy conditions



Floors are frequently hard & uncomfortable with no straw or other bedding - can lead to sores & wounds



Body length of cows has increased over the years; some older cubicles are too short for today's large cows. This forces the cows to lie or stand with their back legs in the passageway in the passageway



Need for a Directive on dairy cows

- Commission refuses to propose a Directive
- So we must turn to General Farm Animals Directive (98/58) & Council of Europe Recommendation on Cattle

Article 3 of Directive 98/58

- Requires Member States:
 - “to make provision to ensure that the owners or keepers take **all** reasonable steps to **ensure** the welfare of animals under their care and
 - to **ensure** that those animals are not caused any unnecessary (i) pain, (ii) suffering or (iii) injury”
- EFSA Scientific Report & Opinions can help us understand what should be taken into account when assessing each of these factors

Council of Europe Recommendation on Cattle

- Commission recognises that the Recommendations made under the European Convention are a binding part of EU law where they use the word “shall” (rather than “should”)
- Even Recommendations that use “should” are relevant - they help interpret Article 3 of Directive 98/58
- Farmers who ignore a Recommendation that uses “should” may find it difficult to demonstrate that they have taken **all reasonable steps** to ensure the welfare of their cows
- Good faith is a core principle of international law. Good faith requires contracting parties (EU & Member States) to a Convention to respect its provisions
- Even if it is not mandatory, the word “should” entails obligation to make a good faith attempt to give effect to a provision

Council of Europe Recommendation on Cattle: outdoor access

- Dairy cows “should be given the opportunity to go outside whenever possible and in summertime preferably every day”