

Cow-comfort options

A cubicle that offers a softer landing, new research from Bristol University on continually housed cows' outdoor choices, and an easy-to-use interlocking footbath. All innovative equipment and interesting research that could help you to improve your cow housing.

text **Rachael Porter**

The great outdoors

More than 55% of continuously housed cows engaged in outside activities when given a free choice. That was the finding of a study, carried out at Reading University, to investigate the behaviour of continuously housed cows given free choice to access an outside environment while fed a TMR indoors, and some of the factors influencing their choice of indoor versus outdoor environments.

"The cubicle housing provided cooler internal temperatures and more indoor activity was observed with this housing system," says Dave

Humphries, who led the trial. "As the temperature outside increased, cows moved indoors housing preference shifted to indoors with only 51% of cows choosing to remain outside at temperatures above 27°C.

"This suggests that if housing conditions could be optimised to suit the cows' requirements then continuous housed systems would have less impact on normal cow behaviour."

The study also indicated that, when attempting to quantify cow behaviour in terms of housing preference, the type of housing, season and

temperature during the period of observation will have an influence on cow behaviour.

The trial was conducted with an average of 27 high yielding lactating Holstein dairy cows.

Cows were housed in one of two systems in separate buildings: cubicles or a straw yard.

The study also showed that temperature tended to have an influence on behaviour. A total of 77% of cows engaged in outside activity when the temperature was less than 17°C. This fell to 51% of cows at more than 27°C.

Cow-comfort cubicle

A hybrid cubicle, known as the Cowcoon, has been launched by Coleraine-based Wilson Agri. The cubicle is designed to make housing dairy cows safer, cleaner and more comfortable by using high-density polyethylene to replace traditional steel components, which the

company says can injure animals and are also liable to corrosion.

"We've introduced a more flexible, yet ductile, component in a place on the cubicle that cows often settle against and that can often lead to injury if an animal falls heavily in the stall," says

the company's Andrew Wilson. "The component is also easier and cheaper for the producer to replace.

"It acts as a sort of shock absorber reducing the load on fixings and virtually eliminates corrosion," he adds.

Interlocking footbath

A narrow interlocking footbath, which enables producers to join two, three or even four footbaths together in sequence without the worry of slippage and a gap appearing between baths, has been added to JFC's range.

The new FB7 will also allow producers to put clean water in the first bath, either as a cleanser or as a receptacle for urine and faeces.

This leaves the remaining baths, which contain medicated solutions,

cleaner and working more efficiently with greater efficacy. The interlocking footbath is 690mm wide and is designed to fit in standard cattle races, which are predominately 738mm, between panels. The footbath's low entry height of 150mm ensures that animals are less nervous when entering the footbath. And its flat bottom and five anti-slip bars are designed to slow the cows' progress through

the bath, ensuring that the feet are adequately bathed in the solution without aggravating any inter-digital lesions.

