

Summer Dairy Concerns

Two of the more common seasonal concerns for the summer on dairy farms are cow comfort/cooling and fly control.

Most of the latest research on cow cooling agrees that a combination of water and wind cools cows more effectively and efficiently than one or the other alone. Older “mister” style sprinklers have been found to be less effective, and at times counter-productive. The small water droplets will cling to the hair on the cows without actually contacting the skin. At a minimum, this diminishes the cooling effects of the water. In some instances, it’s been shown that these droplets can even act as insulation, preventing the natural heat loss from the surface of a cow and trapping it, causing her to be warmer than if no water was used. In addition, the older sprayers could have a significant amount of drift, leading to wet stalls, wet feed, and humid air. Newer “soaker” style sprayers use a high volume of water to shower the back and shoulders of the cows for a short period of time.

Recommendations for fan spacing have not changed significantly. Minor changes as far as spacing and angles may change slightly. Your local dairy supply company or extension will have a wealth of recent information that will help you select the right size and appropriate locations for your fans. Regardless, fans blowing air across wet cows are significantly more effective at cooling than wet cows with little air movement or air movement without water.

Fly control can be lumped into two broad categories: The cows and the environment. There are a few products that can be applied directly to the cows as a pour-on that are approved for lactating cows. Additionally, some of these products work well with back-rubber systems that can be placed near water tanks or in return alleys. These work well if they are recharged appropriately.

Premise spray is a valuable tool for residual fly control in the environment. In addition, bait stations and some of the newer fly strips work well in smaller areas and in tie-stall or stanchion barns. On occasion, I will get a few questions about insect predators or fly wasps. Some farms have had a lot of success with these, but following the recommendations for number of organisms initially and when to add new organisms is extremely important. Also, any premise pesticide that is used to kill flies will also kill these predators, greatly diminishing their effectiveness and leading to dissatisfaction.

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