CHAPTER 7.11.

ANIMAL WELFARE AND DAIRY CATTLE PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

[...]  

Article 7.11.6.

Recommendations on system design and management including physical environment

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5. Flooring, bedding, resting surfaces and outdoor areas

In all production systems cattle need a well-drained and comfortable place to rest. All cattle in a group should have sufficient space to lie down and rest at the same time.

Particular attention should be given to the provisions for areas used for calving. The environment in such areas (e.g. floors, bedding, temperature, calving pen and hygiene) should be appropriate to ensure the welfare of calving cows and new born calves.

In housed systems calving areas should be thoroughly cleaned and provided with fresh bedding between each calving. Group pens for calving should be managed based on the principle ‘all in - all out’. The group calving pen should be thoroughly cleaned and provided with fresh bedding between each animal group. The time interval between first and last calving of cows kept in the same group calving pen should be minimised.

Outdoor calving pens and fields should be selected to provide the cow with a clean and comfortable environment.

Floor management in housed production systems can have a significant impact on cattle welfare. Areas that compromise welfare and are not suitable for resting (e.g. places with excessive faecal accumulation, or wet bedding) should not be included in the determination of the area available for cattle to lie down.

Slopes of the pens should allow water to drain away from feed troughs and not pool the pens.

Flooring, bedding, resting surfaces and outdoor yards should be cleaned as conditions warrant, to ensure good hygiene, comfort and minimise risk of diseases and injuries.

In pasture systems, stock should be rotated between fields to ensure good hygiene and minimise risk of diseases and injuries.
Bedding should be provided to all animals housed on concrete. In straw, sand or other bedding systems such as rubber mats, crumbled-rubber-filled mattresses and waterbeds, the bedding should be suitable (e.g. hygienic, non-toxic) and maintained to provide cattle with a clean, dry and comfortable place in which to lie.

The design of a standing, or cubicle, or free stall, should be such that the animals can stand and lie comfortably on a solid surface (e.g. length, width and height should be appropriate for the size of the largest animal). There should be sufficient room for the animal to rest and to rise adopting normal postures, to move its head freely as it stands up, and to groom itself without difficulty. Where housing design provides only individual spaces are provided for cows to rest, there should be at least one space per cow.

Alleys and gates should be designed and operated to allow free movement of cattle. Floors should be designed to minimise slipping and falling, promote foot health, and reduce the risk of claw injuries.

If a housing system includes areas of slatted floor, cattle, including replacement stock, should have access to a solid lying area. The slat and gap widths should be appropriate to the hoof size of the cattle to prevent injuries.

If cattle have to be tethered whether indoors or outdoors, they should, as a minimum, be able to lie down, stand up, maintain normal body posture and groom themselves unimpeded. Cows kept in tie stall housing should be allowed sufficient untethered exercise to prevent welfare problems. When tethered outdoors they should be able to walk. Animal handlers should be aware of the higher risks of welfare problems where cattle are tethered.

Where breeding bulls are in housing systems, care should be taken to ensure that they have sight of other cattle with sufficient space for resting and exercise. If used for natural mating, the floor should not be slatted or slippery.

Outcome-based measurables: morbidity rates, especially lameness and injuries (e.g. hock and knee injuries and skin lesions), behaviour (e.g. altered locomotion and posture, altered lying time, grooming and not using the intended lying areas), changes in weight and body condition, physical appearance (e.g. hair loss, cleanliness score), growth rate.

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