Cow Comfort

By Julie Berry

Cow comfort is a team approach at Table Rock Farm that included structural and animal health measures.

Measures to Mitigate Lameness at Table Rock

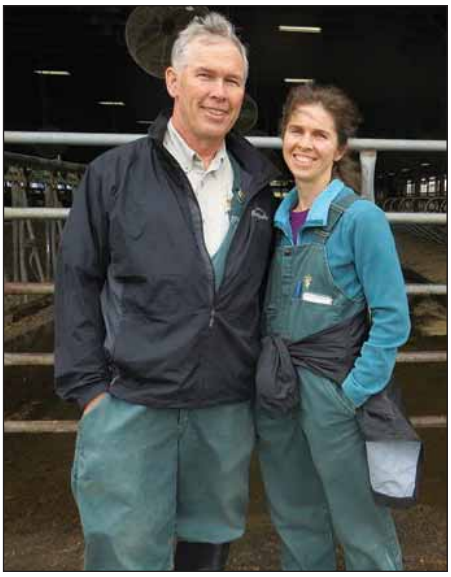
A focus on cow comfort at Table Rock Farm in Castile, NY began with its people.

The solution to an identified lameness issue proved to be multifaceted, and included a collaboration and education of all staff, from cow to maintenance managers.

"We have many great advisers and we've been willing to listen," said Willard De Golyer, who owns the 1,070 cow farm with his wife Maureen, his uncle Calvin and his daughter Meghan Hauser. "A lot of people worked together to identify and improve our lameness and cow comfort. Employees think of things we don't. We appreciate having a PRO-DAIRY team who are willing and excited."

About six years ago the farm family began quarterly locomotion scoring with Bill Stone, who was a PRO-DAIRY specialist then. "He was frustrated with our stalls, as were we," De Golyer said. "Lameness hit a plateau despite our efforts to improve."

This spurred the farm owners to implement improvements. They added rubber to the holding area and return platform, added rubber to steps that led to the upper barn and reduced the rise after hoof wear was observed. Lameness improved and then leveled off. They modified the hoof trimming schedule and had an outside hooftrimmer work with the herspersons. Stone trained all employees in locomotion scoring.



Willard De Golyer and his daugther Meghan Hauser.

They completed an annual time budget three-year study to measure how much time cows spend away from the pen. Rick Grant, Miner Institute, was the farm's guest speaker at their employee annual meeting, and he spoke about the benefits of lying times.

Farm employees read animal welfare advocate Temple Grandin's book *Animals Make Us Human*. "It startled us and made us realize we could do more to improve."

A voluntary New York State Cattle Health Assurance (NYSCHAP) audit identified lameness as a weakness. In year one, the farm passed the audit with 15 percent lameness. In year two, lameness was 11 to 12 percent, and in year three, lameness was 8.5 percent. "The animal welfare audit was a biggie. It pulled everything together," Hauser said. "We started looking at what else we could do."

Novus conducted the C.O.W.S. study at the farm, and found that the high group was on the low end for rest time.

A six-month maintenance schedule was set to inspect and inflate waterbeds. "That added lying time," Hauser said. "Maintenance wasn't too bad after the first time. Now it's just two or three that need maintenance, instead of 20 like it was the first time."

Curt Gooch, PRO-DAIRY, provided leg loggers and partnered with the farm for continued evaluation. Leg loggers showed the high group had the greatest disadvantage, and the farm owners invested nearly $40,000 in stall improvements. Rails on Norbco stalls were moved three times to increase comfort. Norbco stalls were eventually replaced with Sturdy Bilt stalls, concrete was added and a center drop bar was removed. Stall use increased with the modifications, which did not change stall size. "Fewer animals are getting stuck," Hauser said. "They're holding up well without too much maintenance. Curt Gooch designed and Sturdy-Bilt made what we believe is a superior stall."

A channel was installed in the feed alley with a manure collection tube underneath. Alley misters were installed with a stop when cows are milked.

Starting in 2012, lame cows are milked twice, instead of three times a day, based on a study done at Sunnyside Farms, Scipio Center, NY. The study found milk production was similar for 2X cows and body condition scores improved. "It's been positive in their healing," Hauser said.

Foot baths were added to the return lanes, based on research by Nigel Cook, University of Wisconsin, so hooves are dunked twice. A cooling shower was also added in the return lane after milking, and additional fans were installed in the outside row. ❐