Shed upgrade a simple business.... or is it?

FARMERS WEEKLY

Upgrade: A new dairy is about more than steel and concrete; it is about the cows.

OVER the years we have seen many dairy sheds – some small, some large, some full of gadgets, some with none, some work, some do not.

What is best? What is important? For starters, think cows – it's for them you do this, right?

The thing is that if the cows are happy, they will like your shed, and when they like your shed, you will like it, because the cows like it.

Most builders think engineering, steel and concrete, while most plant people think equipment, pumps, drains, tanks, chillers, etc. All very important, but who is thinking cows? You are, of course – are you?

In all the work we have done over the years in handling stock and manufacturing equipment, we start with thinking like a cow or cattle beast. We see many systems, so we have a good idea of what works and what does not.

Secondly, think people, and last but not least, think steel, concrete and engineering.

Sure, sometimes compromises have to be made to settle for what is possible within a range of options and dollars, but in the end, if the cows are not happy, nor will you be.

So, thinking cows goes a long way to ensure your new shed will work. A bit of external help and review may be good money spent.

And make sure you think carefully about animal handling equipment. Do not just buy what is on the quote; talk to an animal handling expert, some one or a company who have made and sold this type of equipment for many years. Maybe one which has a few awards and IP protected systems.

A proper headbail does not look like a sliding gate or a few pipes slammed together.

What about water use, or the lack of it? Pumping water costs money, and creates more waste than what is needed. Why do we need to use this much water? Many other countries milk more cows than we do and use a lot less water.

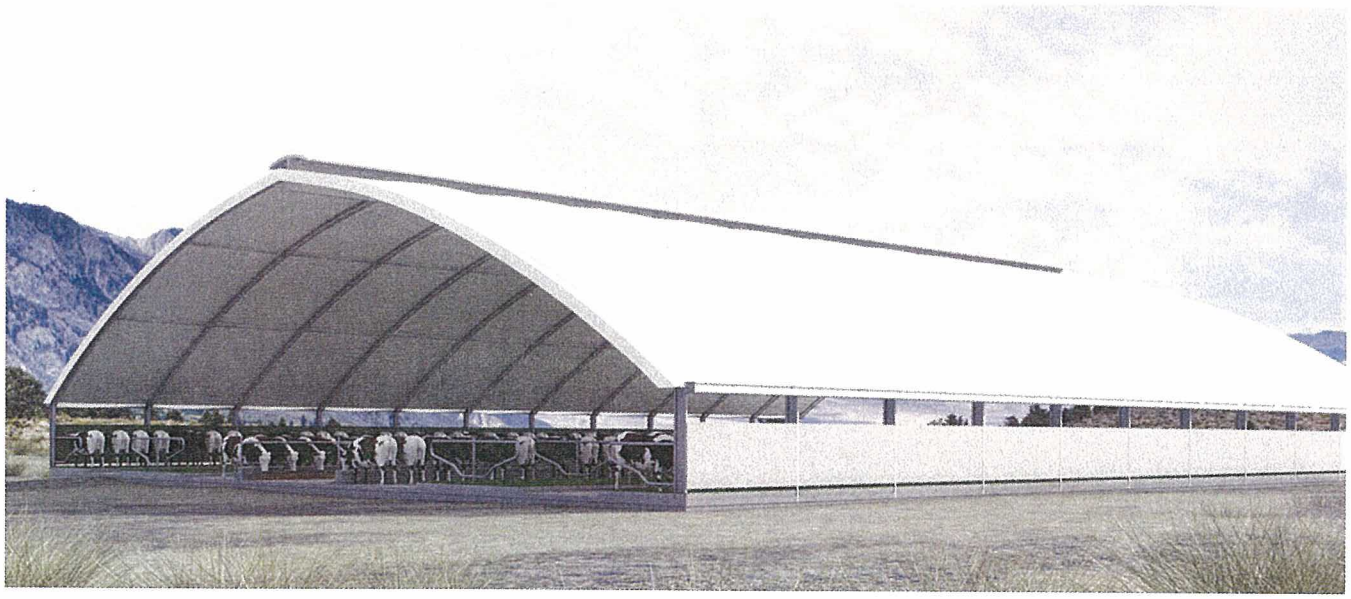
Technically we seem to be spending a lot of money on a shed effluent problem, which in reality is only two per cent of the real problem, which is water. More to the point, remove the water and we have no shed waste problem.

So start with saving water at the source. Even green water use is not addressing the real issue. Investing in clean water saving systems pays a greater dividend than dealing with the waste at the bottom of the cliff.

When it comes to feeding systems, just remember cows can only eat as much as time allows them to be in the shed, so if you have seven minutes per row or per rotation that means the cow has seven minutes to eat 2kg of feed – and the feed they eat is like

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Shady ladies: keeping the effluent out of the water and keeping cows in shade or shelter may just help to keep cows happy.



Cow care: The DairyHouse is a new emerging dairy housing solution which incorporates a complete cow wellbeing design focus

Shed upgrades a complex issue

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

eating dry Weetbix for breakfast.

What you need is a drink after that, so there is a trough (and space) close by that cows can drink out of before they walk back to the pasture in the heat.

No water, no metabolism, no milk: a cow is not a dry powder plant.

Feeding on feedpads can work brilliantly, but what about shade or all-weather cover. Again, keeping that water out of the effluent and keeping cows in shade or shelter may just help to keep cows happy.

I see many troughs in use in New Zealand, but also see many troughs with moulded feed. Ever tried eating off a dirty plate?

Did you know cows hate the smell of each other's saliva? Have a proper feed-lane designed with proper feed pushing systems may just do a better job and use feed more efficiently and keep cows happier.

Robot milking an option? For sure it is ... and slowly in New Zealand we are seeing more uptake, but it's very slow.

But why? New Zealand invented the herringbone and the rotary cowshed, yet our uptake of robotics lags the rest of the world. There are so many advantages.

Before you build that new shed, maybe have a chat to experts. Open your mind to employing no or fewer staff.

Last but not least, dairy housing ...

There are many more farmers now clearly thinking along this way. It is understandable, as it is to date the only way to actually combat N leaching and drive efficiencies of dry matter conversion. That said, real know-how on what works and what does not is very thin in the ground.

Again, there are many people keen to sell structures and concrete, but very few understand what happens and what needs doing when we put cows inside.

Your first stop should really be to talk to someone who understands housing cows and what they need, rather than someone selling steel and concrete or plant.

Focus on the cow and you will get it right. Get others involved, and accept that good information and expertise cost money to obtain. But then again a failed project costs you even more.

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