

Good Footing Improves Estrous Detection

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Estrous behavior is dramatically affected by the footing surface on which cows interact. Cows that interact on dirt show standing estrus longer than cows that interact on a grooved concrete surface (13.8 hours vs. 9.4 hours). In addition, cows on dirt display over twice the number of stands (6.3 vs 2.9) and mounts (7.0 vs 3.2) than cows on concrete. There is no doubt that dirt surfaces provide more secure footing during mounting.

Slippery concrete is a major negative factor influencing poor estrus behavior (standing and mounting), cow safety and comfort. Grooving slippery concrete can have profound positive effects on estrous detection.

One problem accompanying a dirt surface for cow interaction is mud. Mud creates a host of problems including difficult mobility, poor mounting, poor foot health, injury and poor udder hygiene. Further, mud on the udder can dramatically increase udder and teat washing time. Mud undoubtedly reduces cow comfort, increases stress and compromises all aspects of production efficiency (including reducing worker comfort and efficiency). Steps should be taken to eliminate exposure to mud.

Take-Home Messages

- Dirt footing enhances estrous behavior.
- An excellent time to watch cows for estrus is when they are moved from concrete to a dirt exercise lot.
- Mud should be eliminated from the dairy management environment.

(Some material for this article was written by P. L. Senger, Washington State University)