

Beyond The Bucket



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New Heights with Cow Care

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Efficiency challenges don't always require new buildings—sometimes the best improvements come from optimizing what you already have.
- Small changes in procedures, maintenance, and cow care can deliver big gains in parlor performance and milk quality.
- Asking the right questions is the first step to uncovering the real source of inefficiencies.
- Consistent routines, well-maintained equipment, and cow comfort are the foundation of sustainable efficiency.
- Expert guidance and a problem-solving mindset unlock hidden opportunities for long-term success.

New Heights with Cow Care

Recently, while driving between farm visits, I recalled a conversation I had with a dairy producer a few years ago. I was part of a big-picture conversation with the dairyman and team who wanted to invest in a new, larger milking facility so his son would have better opportunities and a brighter future in the business. As part of the conversation, we learned his main concern was that his current parlor wasn't efficient enough. The dairyman thought the answer to getting more cows through the parlor was its size.

Everyone in the room got excited and started punching numbers and brainstorming layout options for a new bigger facility. Initially, the group rallied around this assumption. The excitement of something new took hold until someone in the room asked:

“Why isn't your current parlor efficient enough?”

That interjection changed everything. Instead of assuming that inefficiency meant new construction, we dug deeper to get a better understanding of what was really happening in the parlor.

MINOR CHANGES, MAJOR IMPACT

Within 30 days, we conducted a full parlor audit on the farm. This included everything from system checks and wash cycles to observing milking procedures and cow flow. The results were surprising.

By implementing a handful of adjustments, refining procedures, improving maintenance, and optimizing cow comfort, the impact was dramatic:

- Turns per hour improved
- Milking duration was cut in half
- Quality counts improved
- Parlor run time decreased
- Cows were more comfortable in and out of the parlor



All of this happened within 45 days, and without any construction. The producer was amazed. His 20-year-old parlor had become more efficient than ever, simply because we asked the right questions and executed on some data findings.

WHY THE RIGHT QUESTIONS MATTER

This scenario is more common than you might think. As equipment ages, inefficiencies creep in, but often the first step isn't more steel and concrete; it's fine-tuning and critically evaluating what you already have. The key is stepping back and asking the right questions, even if the answers aren't what you first expect.

When it comes to parlor performance, below are some essential questions to guide your thinking:

Procedures & Efficiency

- Am I harvesting milk as efficiently and comfortably as possible?
- Do I have a proper prep procedure in place? Is it being followed, or has procedural drift set in?
- Across my herd, what is my teat end score on a 1–4 scale?

Cow Care in action—ensuring the parlor equipment is functioning properly.

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Equipment & Maintenance

- Is my parlor maintained regularly, and is all equipment evaluated on a consistent schedule?
- Is my equipment helping me milk cows efficiently, or slowing me down?

Cow Comfort & Flow

- Do cows enter the parlor willingly, or am I chasing them in?
- Are cows comfortable both inside and outside the parlor? Do they have consistent access to fresh water, feed, and clean, restful stalls?
- How many cows are in the hospital pen, and is that number too high?



Team work and communication are key to Cow Care success.



COW CARE TEAM OF EXPERIENCED DAIRY PROFESSIONALS

Our Cow Care team embodies the same problem-solving approach described in this article. We exist to ask these questions, ensuring the well-being of each cow and the integrity of all products and equipment that come into contact with them. It is not just about what we do, but how we show up – as trusted experts, out-of-the-box thinkers, and problem solvers. *We don't believe in the bare minimum.* Our job is to address the problem or concern, but it's in our nature to ask, "What else?" It's not just about solving milk quality problems but making sure everything is functioning optimally.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Efficiency gains don't always require new facilities. Sometimes the most cost-effective improvements come from rethinking daily routines, maintaining current assets correctly, and focusing on animal comfort. In fact, small adjustments and proper techniques—done consistently, can mean big wins for both your cows and your success.

Testing is a critical function performed by our Cow Care team.

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Performing regular checks on milking equipment is vital to maintaining herd health.

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP AND PUT THESE PRINCIPLES INTO ACTION?

Join us for our inaugural Cow Care Extravaganza (CCX) event in Evans, Colorado, happening on Wednesday, September 17. Our team, along with industry expert Roger S. Thomson, D.V.M., MQ-IQ Consulting, Founder, Michigan State University, Instructor, College of Veterinary Medicine & Department of Animal Science, will share proven strategies, demonstrate best practices, and explore how National Mastitis Council guidelines can help elevate both efficiency and welfare in your operation. Teaching assistants from DeLaval, GEA, and Lely will also participate in the training experience.

Interested in more information about this unique event?



The Dairy Solutions Group (TDSG) is a dairy equipment provider with a focus on high-end solutions based around service, maintenance and full parlor installations. The TDSG team focuses on building long-term relationships with producers, with the goal of providing mutually beneficial dairy services for years to come as we strive to go beyond the call for our dairy customers. For more information, visit www.tdsg.us.