PROJECT 2013-2018

BETTER ANIMAL WELFARE LEADS TO IMPROVED ANIMAL HEALTH AND LONGEVITY, AND ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES TO DAIRY PRODUCERS

Principal Investigator:
DORIS PELLERIN
Université Laval

COLLABORATORS:
Greg Keefe
University of Prince Edward Island

Elsa Vasseur
McGill University

Derek Haley
University of Guelph

Karin Orsel
University of Calgary

Jeffrey Rushen, Anne-Marie de Passillé
University of British Columbia

Number of students trained (MSc, PhD, Post-Doc):	**11**
TOTAL BUDGET	**$630,180**

INVESTMENT PARTNERS

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

OBJECTIVES:

Develop a science-based advisory tool that will help dairy producers improve animal welfare and thus improve animal health and farm profitability.

Specific objectives were:

1. To determine whether the feedback from our previous survey led the producers to make changes in management or housing, the reasons why such changes were made (or not made) and the consequences of these changes for cow health and welfare;
2. To determine the impact of participatory approaches (focus farm groups) to enhance the adoption of practices and procedures to improve the cow comfort on dairy farms;
3. To document economic benefits associated with following the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle within the context of supply management;
4. To develop a simplified advisory tool for improved cow comfort that is more suitable for use by advisors on commercial dairy farms and test this tool out on a second large sample of farms both for its perceived value by producers and for its ability to identify farms with high prevalence of lameness, hoof lesions and low longevity.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- A simplified and practical advisory tool was tested on farms to assess cow comfort. Results show that the assessment time was reduced by approximately 50% (or about to 3 hours), depending on the herd size, compared to the complete advisory tool published following the Dairy Research Cluster 1.
- A web-based benchmarking system was created to allow producers to compare their scores for each welfare element evaluated and have access to information and resources about how to improve their score for each of these elements.
- New knowledge on the effects of giving reports that include benchmarking, in comparison with peers, after on-farm welfare and comfort assessment on the changes applied by dairy farmers in tie-stall and freestall systems.
- Demonstrated the existence of a positive association between dairy cow welfare on-farm and farm productivity and profitability, both in terms of meeting specific criteria included in an assessment but also generally.

LINK TO KTT TOOLS

WEB-BASED TOOL:

Online tool for self-assessment and benchmarking system for dairy cow comfort
benchmarkcowcomfort.com

FACT SHEETS:

Lameness - Information Document:
dairyresearch.ca/pdf/lameness_en.pdf

Body Condition Score - Information Document:
dairyresearch.ca/pdf/bodyconditionscore_en.pdf

Hock, Knee & Neck Injuries - Information Document:
dairyresearch.ca/pdf/EN_PLC_blessures_final_May242017.pdf