

CDG Milk  
12 May 2015

# The welfare of dairy cows

Olga Kikou  
[olga.kikou@ciwf.org](mailto:olga.kikou@ciwf.org)



# Legislation

- No specific dairy welfare legislation
- Directive 98/58 on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes: basic framework requiring MS to enact legislation re welfare
- Council of Europe Recommendation on Cattle: principles on stockmanship, buildings and equipment, general management and breeding

# Bad systems and practices:

- i. Permanent housing of dairy cows
- ii. Tethering of dairy cows (except briefly for treatment or veterinary examination)
- iii. Lack of pasture and grazing access
- iv. Selection for unsustainably high milk yields
- v. Absence of comfortable lying areas
- vi. Early induction of birth.

# Mega dairies



Fewer smaller and medium sized dairy farms.  
Intensification of production through mega dairies.  
Impact on animal welfare, environment, farmers' livelihoods.



# Zero grazing systems

- Many cows kept indoors all year – or almost all year
- CIWF dairy investigation 2012 visited 52 farms in Germany, Denmark & Spain
- Over 50% kept cows indoors all year



## tie stalls - tethering

Unable to move other than to lie down, stand up, take a few steps backwards, forwards and sideways

# Inadequate housing

Floors are frequently hard & uncomfortable with no straw or other bedding - can lead to sores & wounds



Barren, overcrowded,  
often filthy conditions





# Cubicle size

Body length of cows has increased over the years; some older cubicles are too short for today's large cows. This forces the cows to lie or stand with their back legs in the passageway

# Health issues

- Lameness: incidence in 25% of farms
- Mastitis: one of the most frequent and costly diseases
- Fertility
- Mortality
- Dystocia
- Breeding for high milk yields



# Health problems associated with high milk yields



- Many dairy cows have been pushed through genetic selection to yield of around 6,000–8,000 litres per annum or more
- Pressures on high yielding cows are so great that many are utterly worn out after just three or four milk cycles and are prematurely culled
- EFSA: “Long term genetic selection for high milk yield is the major factor causing poor welfare, in particular health problems, in dairy cows”

# Lameness

- Hock lesions are correlated with lameness
- Foot trimming regularly improves the level of lameness within a herd
- Poor slurry management and bad housing are risk factors for causing lameness



# Better systems and practices

- i. Systems with good winter housing and access to pasture in the grass growing season
- ii. Clean and comfortable resting areas where all cows are able to rest simultaneously
- iii. Functional areas for feeding, drinking, socialising etc. should also be provided.

# Access to pasture: an experience many of Europe's dairy cows do not have



EFSA: “If dairy cows are not kept on pasture for parts of the year, i.e. they are permanently on a zero-grazing system, there is an increased risk of lameness, hoof problems, teat tramp, mastitis, metritis, dystocia, ketosis, retained placenta and some bacterial infections”

# Future steps:

- Need to respect Directive 98/58
- The EU should enact legislation for the welfare of dairy cows based on the Welfare Quality principles of Good Feeding, Good Housing, Good Health, Appropriate Behaviour
- Reverse the trend from an industrial approach towards a more animal welfare, environment and farmer friendly approach

