



**ANIMAL CARE AND WELL-BEING
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

DAIRY CATTLE



Q. Why are dairy cows so thin compared to beef cattle?

A. Healthy dairy cows have less muscling and body fat and look skinnier than beef cattle. Dairy cows that are too heavy may have trouble giving birth and might develop health problems.

Q. Do cows like to be around other cows?

A. Yes, cows like to hang out with each other because they're very social, herd animals! If cows can't see, hear, smell or touch other cows, it is stressful to them.

Q. Why do the cows have tags in their ears?

A. Every cow has an identification number printed on her ear tag. Farmers use the number to find a cow quickly and to track things like how much milk she gives, how much to feed her and when her next calf is due.

Q. Does milking a cow hurt her?

A. When done properly, milking doesn't hurt the cow, it actually makes her feel better. When her udder is full of milk, she may be carrying around as much as 70 extra pounds! Milking takes away the extra weight so she's more comfortable. The bonus is that milking gives humans a healthy, wholesome food.

Q. Why do cows lie down so much?

A. When cows are comfortable and relaxed, they lie down for about 12 hours a day. Lying down helps them to digest their food and produce milk.



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Q. Why are the cows lying on piles of straw?

A. Just like people, cows want comfortable beds. The thick layer of straw bedding used at fairs and shows gives the cows a comfortable cushion to stand and rest on. Straw is also easy for exhibitors to move and clean.

Q. Why are the cows chewing gum?

A. They're not really chewing gum, they're *chewing their cud* – or in scientific terms, *ruminating*. Cows, sheep, goats and camels are *ruminant animals*. That means the animal has a four-chambered stomach and can digest feed that a single-chambered human stomach can't handle. A cow's *cud* is food it has belched up from her first stomach chamber. Chewing the food again grinds it into very small pieces that are more easily digested in the next stomach chamber, the *rumen*.

Q. How can you tell when a cow is sick?

A. Farmers carefully watch their cattle's normal behavior, so they can often tell when a cow isn't feeling well just by the way she's acting. Sick cows eat and drink less and rest a lot more than usual. They may also have a fever or show other symptoms. If farmers recognize any of these signs of illness, they can take appropriate action to help the cow get better.

Q. Why won't cows walk through puddles?

A. Cows see the world very differently than humans do. They have poor depth perception, which means they can't easily tell how deep a shiny puddle is. Contrasting colors, like white lines on dark concrete, also make it hard for a cow to tell if she's walking on stable ground or about to fall in a hole.

Q. Why are there fans in the cow barn?

A. Cows develop heat stress in hot, humid weather, which causes them to eat and drink less and produce less milk than usual. So we put fans in cow barns to help keep them cool, comfortable and healthy.



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