

The Five Freedoms – as discussed by the RSPCA

[Bold print are the areas Wilson Agriculture consider important for Dairy Housing]

The welfare of the dairy cow may be assessed in the context of the guidelines known as the Five Freedoms. All of these should be largely achievable but may be susceptible to a variety of influences, such as standards of stockmanship. A brief examination of dairy farming practices in relation to the *Five Freedoms* follows:

1. *Freedom from hunger and thirst* may be provided by adequate management and stockmanship which ensure that appropriate quantities of suitable feed and water are available daily and are distributed in a manner which facilitates access for all animals. Improvements in our understanding of digestive physiology and nutrient requirements, coupled with improved methods for conserving winter feed, mean that properly managed cattle should rarely suffer from inadequate nutrition.
2. *Freedom from discomfort* can be achieved, even in exposed grazing areas, by the provision of artificial protection from the weather where no natural shelter or shade is available. When cattle are housed, a **well-ventilated shed, a comfortably bedded, dry lying area and frequently cleaned passageways** are necessary to avoid discomfort and to reduce the risk of injury.
3. Farmers should aim towards *freedom from pain, injury and disease* in the herd. Lameness is one of the most significant welfare problems facing the dairy industry today and there has been an increase in incidence over the years. We now have a better understanding of the causes yet the current level of incidence is unacceptably high. To a large extent, the problem can be resolved by improved environment, nutrition and breeding. The incidence of infectious diseases can, in many cases, be reduced by routine preventive medicine but that of mastitis, although greatly reduced since the 1960s, is still a cause for concern.
4. *Freedom to express normal behaviour* is usually provided when a cow is at pasture. **When housed, it is essential that building design and good stockmanship allow cattle to behave naturally and do not adversely affect their welfare.** Some have expressed concern that the early removal of the calf from its mother is unnatural and a cause of poor welfare to both.
5. *Freedom from fear and distress* is seldom completely achieved in any husbandry system. Indeed, there are times when fear stimulates beneficial avoidance action by animals. However, stockmen can minimise fear and distress by careful supervision and by sympathetic handling when moving cattle around the farm.

Good welfare can be achieved through a high standard of stockmanship, effective management, adequate housing and well-maintained equipment.

“Six Freedoms For Cubicle Design” - Neil Anderson, DVM, MSc

- “Freedom to **stretch their front legs forward.**”
- “Freedom to **lie on their sides, with unobstructed space for their neck and head.**”
- “Freedom to **rest their heads against their sides without hindrance from a partition.**”
- “Freedom to **rest with their legs, udder and tails on the platform.**”
- “Freedom to **stand or lie without fear or pain from neck rails, partitions, or supports.**”
- “Freedom to **rest on a clean, dry and soft bed.**”

Anderson, Neil, DVM, MSc, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Fergus, Ontario, Canada. “Time-lapse Video Opens Our Eyes to Cow Behavior and Comfort” Proceedings from 34th annual convention American Association of Bovine Practitioners. Vol. 34 pp 35-42.