

Do You Let Your Cows Outside in the Spring and Summer?

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This is a question we get a lot, and most people who ask us this question just want to know that our cows have comfortable and happy lives. The truth is, that's all we want for our cows, too. A good rule of thumb is to think, would you want to be outside? When it's raining or hailing or ninety degrees and humid you probably wouldn't want to be outside, and neither would our cows. Our farm model is not set up to let our cows outside in the spring and summer. Instead, we focus our time and energy making the inside feel like the outside, only better. It's really pretty simple: when the cows are happy, they make more, higher quality milk. We help them do this through meticulously designing our barns to provide environmental control, high quality airflow, and encouraging the most natural cow behaviors.

Our barns are built to provide our cows, first and foremost with reliable shelter or protection from the elements. They protect our cows from the wet, wind and cold while also organizing the girls into peer groups. Each barn has pens that have groups of cows in the same age range or production group. Since cattle are herd animals, they are happy to find their friend group and stick with their gal-pals. With the cows in groups, they produce a lot of body heat. This means that even though it may feel very cold outside, inside our barns it can be anywhere from 10-25 degrees warmer. A cow's favorite temperature is right around 35-45 degrees so we sometimes have to focus more on airflow and cooling our cows.

The best ways we help our cows stay cool and get fresh air are by opening up the curtains, turning on fans and turning on misters. Almost the entire side walls of our barns can be open to the outside by lowering a heavy-duty curtain. We have also installed a computer program and machine that controls the opening and closing of the curtains automatically based on the ambient temperature in the barn. In addition, we have fans placed both above our cows to move air plus at the ends of the barns to pull clean, fresh air through the barns. It is because of these fans that you will sometimes see the side curtains on the barns closed in the summer time. This is usually because there is very little wind outside, and with the large fans at the ends of the barn and the curtains closed, we can create a "tunnel" effect getting more cool, fresh air to the cows than they would naturally get outside. Think of this like air conditioning in your house, you wouldn't turn the AC on with all the windows open, would you? Finally, we have misters along where our cows eat to promote evaporative cooling. So while our ladies grab a snack, they get a nice cool mist sprayed on them and the fans help to dry that mist that dissipates the heat they produce.

With our cows housed in the barn we are able to ensure that they all have equal opportunities to engage in the most natural cow behaviors. What do we mean by that? We mean that each cow, regardless of her pecking order in the herd, always has: a dry comfortable place to lay down, easy access to water, and as much food as she could ever want. The stalls we have for our cows are designed to be long enough and wide enough for cows to lay down and get up

easily without impeding airflow or cow socialization. We add soft, dry bedding that is recycled from the farm to our cows stalls in addition to the waterbed mattresses to add an extra layer of comfort. If you see cows in a pasture you may notice they lay on top of hills or knolls, this would be because these are usually the driest locations in the field with good airflow, just like we provide in the barn!

By having our cows in the climate controlled barns with adequate airflow and free choice to engage in their natural activities we create a safe comfortable environment for them to produce milk. If you ever want to see these amenities for our cows in action, please reach out to us to set up a tour.