

# Palpation Facilities for Conducting Dairy Reproductive Herd Health Programs

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There are many key elements in making a dairy reproductive herd health program successful. The success of any such program is dependent upon the complete cooperation of all involved personnel; the maintenance and periodic evaluation of complete, accurate records on every cow within the herd; the regular scheduling of routine herd health visits; and the availability of a safe, comfortable palpation facility. The information gained during routine rectal palpations forms the basis for many important decisions regarding the management of each cow within the herd. Because of this, palpation facilities should be safe, both for the cows and the palpator; should be comfortable for the palpator; and should cause the cows minimal stress.

All too often little thought is given to proper facility design for conducting routine reproductive herd health programs. Many dairymen expect veterinarians to be happy palpating cows in milking parlors or make-shift facilities. Although quality herd health programs can be conducted in less-than-desirable facilities, simple, inexpensive, well-designed facilities improve palpator attitudes and usually cause less stress for each individual cow.

FIGURE 1. Cows walking into palpation facility.

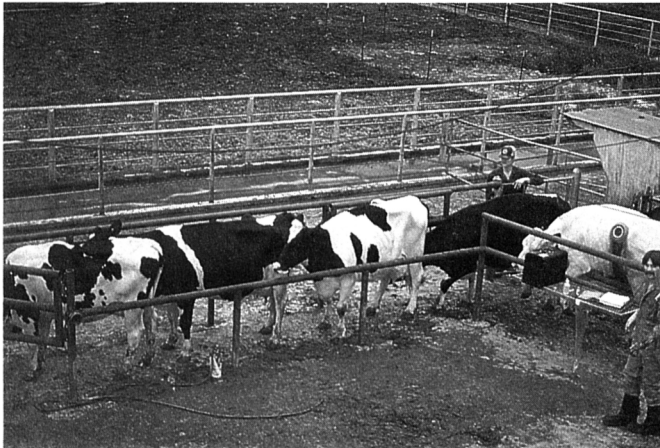
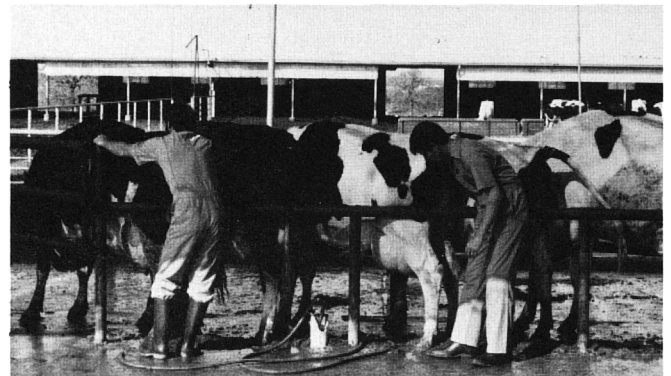


FIGURE 2. Palpation facility containing five large Holstein cows. The same facility will hold seven Jersey cows.



FIGURE 3. Palpating cows. The cows are not restrained individually during palpation.



Figures 1-5 illustrate a simple, inexpensive dairy palpation facility which is constructed of scrap pipe. The palpation area is usually best located near the exit door from the milking parlor so that cows can be separated following milking. The cows are walked into the palpation area and held without individual restraint. The cows stand at a forty-five degree angle. This makes the perineal area of the cow available to the palpator. The palpation facility can be angled to accommodate either right-handed or left-handed palpators. The length of the palpation area determines the number of cows restrained at any given time.

Having multiple cows restrained at the same time during palpation evaluations allows both the palpator and technician giving injections, etc. to work simultaneously. Cows express very minimal stress while being handled in this palpation facility.

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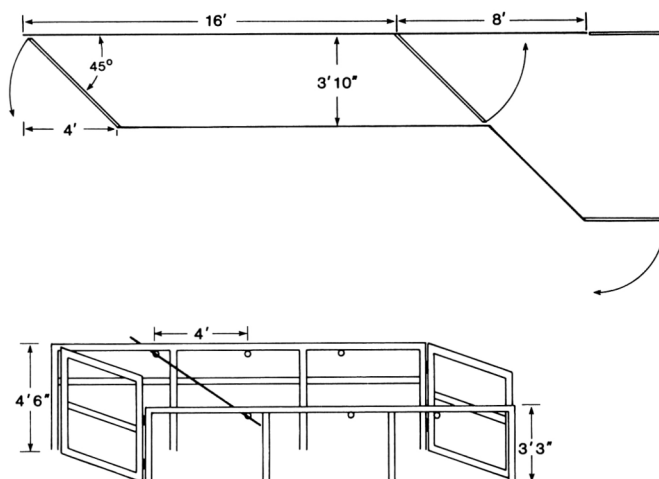
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FIGURE 4. A chute with a head catch and a table for drugs and records can be built near the palpation facility.



FIGURE 5. Dimensions of palpation facility.



## REPRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY IN POSTPARTUM DAIRY COWS BASED ON PROGESTERONE CONCENTRATIONS IN MILK OR RECTAL EXAMINATION

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The postpartum reproductive activity of 463 cows in five commercial farms was monitored using milk progesterone assays and rectal examination of the ovaries. The mean interval from calving to the first progesterone rise was  $30.6 \pm 0.94$  days. Based on progesterone concentrations in milk, 31 per cent of cows were anoestrus until day 30 postpartum and 7 per cent were anoestrus until day 50. There were 719 ovulations confirmed in all, of which 38 per cent were associated with observed oestrus. An oestrus was more likely ( $p < 0.05$ ) to be observed during the breeding period than before it (44 per cent vs. 35 per cent). Ten per cent of observations of oestrus were found not to be associated with ovulation. Short cycles occurred in 4 per cent of cows, prolonged elevated progesterone concentrations in the absence of inseminations occurred in 3 per cent of cows; whilst a further 3 per cent had an extended period of low progesterone concentrations following concentrations sufficient to confirm that ovulation had occurred. Based on rectal examinations and observation, uterine abnormalities were detected in 10 per cent of cows and cystic follicles in only 2 per cent.

These results indicate that, on the farms involved, most dairy cows had resumed reproductive activity by 50 days postpartum, that the incidence of abnormal reproductive activity postpartum is relatively small and that the efficiency of observation of oestrus by stockmen is, for the most part, low.

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