

## Are the cows trying to tell you something???

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*“You miss more by not looking than by not knowing.”- Unknown*

Day in and day out, dairy cows provide producers, nutritionists, and veterinarians with a great deal of information. Unfortunately, we don't always take full advantage of what the cows are trying to tell us. As dairy producers, owners and/or managers, you see your cows every day and some subtle or gradual changes may go unnoticed. Today, take a moment to “listen” closely not only with your eyes, but also with your ears and nose.

The following observations, if commonplace, suggest problems.

<u>Observation</u>	<u>Potential source(s) of problem...</u>
Undesirable body condition	Ration; lameness; and/or heat detection
Rough hair coat	Ration; health status; parasites
Dirty, manure-covered cows	Cow comfort; barn/stall management
Hock lesions	Lack of bedding on back of mattresses; other problems with curb or stall bedding/base
Cows with “zippers” (lots of DAs)	Transition ration and/or management
Undesirable heifer size and/or condition	Heifer ration and/or management
Lameness	Ration; concrete; and/or cow comfort
Cows not lying in freestalls	Cow comfort (including ventilation <b>and</b> heat stress)
Fresh cow problems	Transition ration and/or management
Poor milk production, low dry matter intake	Cow comfort; water availability; ration problems; poor management; forage quality
Poor cud chewing	Low effective fiber; fat content of ration
Undesirable manure consistency	Ration protein, NSC, and/or effective fiber content; infectious disease?
Feed sorting	Ration moisture, particle length, and/or palatability; forage quality
Poor milk components	Compromised rumen function; ration fiber, fat, and/or protein content
Cows clustered around waterer(s)	Poor water availability
Lapping water vs. proper drinking	Stray voltage?
Increased flight distance, nervousness	Rough handling; stray voltage?

In addition to observation, you should also use your ears to learn about the cows. Things to listen for include: infrequent urination, possibly indicating poor water availability; “plopping” of manure, indicating proper consistency; squeaking of free stall loops/neck rails when cows stand up, indicating poor stall dimensions; coughing, indicating poor ventilation and/or respiratory disease; and cows slipping, possibly indicating poor traction and/or heat activity.

Use your nose to “listen” to the cows as well. Certain odors suggest problems are occurring in any of several areas. An ammonia smell in the barn indicates poor ventilation and/or insufficient gutter or alley cleaning. Moldy hay and poorly fermented silage commonly have undesirable odors. Cows with a ketone odor are in negative energy balance (some people can smell this, others can't); cows with a rotten or bad odor often have a uterine infection or retained placenta. Water may have an off odor indicating possible quality and/or palatability problems.

Take the time to “listen” to the cows and closely evaluate their environment. It usually provides insight into problems that are decreasing herd productivity. Remember, the cows are always trying to tell us something. We just have to take the time to hear what they have to say.