

# New Hoard facilities . . . the first six months

—by Hoard's Dairyman magazine and farm staff—

**I**T IS too early to tell how well things will go in our new facilities on an ongoing basis. But we thought it was time to provide an update.

To recap, we began using a new 232-head, free stall barn and new double-10 herringbone last June 21. (See October 25, 2007, issue, page 698.) That was just about 200 days after we broke ground.

On moving day, we strung a temporary fence with horse tape between the old lot and the new free stall barn. It is a distance of about 200 feet.

After morning milking, the cows were sorted into the three groups that they were going to be in . . . heifers, early- and later-lactation. The electronic ID collars were placed on each cow, and they were activated. The move gave the cows a good nine hours to roam, sniff, and bellow before the first milking in the new parlor.

We have three sections in the new, two-row barn. So, the first group of cows in were going to go in the far end. The stumbling block was that they had to cross grates covering our manure drops. In hindsight, we would have covered those grates, perhaps with heavy plywood sheets, and covered them with sand or some bedding. Before long, the cows found the feed, water, and free stalls and began to appear like they were going to like it there.

## Cross-alley cows . . .

That is not to say every cow hopped right into a free stall. There were "alley" cows. Actually, we began to call them "cross-alley cows." We had put rubber matting in our cross alleys. We did this because we were told that is where much of the mounting activity would take place, and we wanted to do as much breeding as possible based on our electronic activity-monitoring system and visual observation.

So we have no regrets about the rubber matting, but that's where cows will lie if they're not lying in a free stall. This explains why it is not recommended to put rubber matting in feed alleys, although that has been tried as a way to encourage uptake.

Over a period of several weeks, we had fewer and fewer "alley" cows. There were 240 cows in the barn during early December, and we had four routine alley cows. Two more habitual alley cows were relegated back to the old barn where we keep our treated cows and our fresh cows get their start.

## The first milking . . .

It went about like you would expect. Most of the cows had to be manhandled into position. Every

attempt was made to keep the process as calm and quiet as possible. We had plenty of help on hand, and the experienced hands said it could have been a lot worse. Guernseys can be stubborn, but they aren't wild. We didn't have any cows trying to hurdle partitions or race from one end of the holding pen to the other.

It took probably 15 minutes of pushing, shoving, balking, and maneuvering to get the first 10 cows in place. There was lots of excitement, lots of people trying to help, and lots of unfamiliar controls. And the wrong button got pushed. So, before anyone got a hand on the udders of that first group, the rapid-exit gate went up, and the 10 cows happily headed for the return lane.

By about the third milking, the 2-year-olds were loading eagerly. The older cows, of course, were

Foot health in the new barn has been a pleasant surprise. The cows now are spending more time on concrete than they did before, but incidence of lameness has been just as low, if not, lower than before. All cows are trimmed when they are dry treated. Heifers get trimmed a month before calving when they also get a dry cow treatment.

## Cows doing well . . .

We think our Guernseys have adapted to their new way of life even better than we might have expected. Stall use is good, and the cows are clean.

Of course, the proof is in the performance. We focused on milk production and somatic cell count to get a handle on the before and after . . . at least, up to this point.

The table shows the average of the fall 2006 DHI test days in our

Test day changes				
Cows in milk	Average Sept., Oct., Nov. 2006			SCC
	MLM*	Lbs. milk	Lbs. fat and protein	
140	63.7	50.5	4.19	368
<b>September 2007</b>				
218	69	57.2	4.48	564
<b>October 2007</b>				
240	68	54.6	4.47	525
<b>November 2007</b>				
270	69	54.4	4.54	277

\*Management level milk

500s after moving into the new facilities really got our attention. That especially was the case considering our move into completely new facilities that were designed to make everything better.

People had warned us that SCC was going to go up. But it's also human nature to think your own situation is going to be different. Quite concerned, we began to look for a smoking gun. Surely, there must have been something wrong. But there didn't appear to be anything obvious. Proper milking procedures were being followed. The cows were clean. Teat ends looked good. Weekly tank cultures were negative for contagious pathogens and minimal for environmental.

It was a relief to see that SCC dropped to 277 on the November test. As this is being written at the end of November, the 240 cows in the new barn tank are averaging around 250.

## Blame it on stress . . .

We can't put our finger on anything specific that caused the higher SCCs. Mostly likely, it was just that nebulous thing called stress. There was the stress of a new barn, despite the sand-bedded stalls. There was the stress of being milked in a new place with a new system. And there was the stress of new herdmates. In addition to the flow of fresh cows into the barn, we added purchased cows to the new facilities on July 2, August 1, August 20, September 15, and October 24.

Did the stress that raised SCC make the cows more susceptible to other problems? Probably so. We had a bout with what we believed was bovine respiratory syncytial virus. We have had a suspected history of BSRV in our heifer barn. We vaccinated and revaccinated the cow herd and still lost several cows.

To be realistic, we should say "so far, so good." Things could fall apart any day. However, all things considered, we are pleased with our experiences to date. In future articles, we will discuss the reasoning behind some of the features that are a part of our new facility. 🐄



**HOARD'S DAIRYMAN FARM EMPLOYEES** were vital to a successful move. From left to right they are: Kyle Grosenick, Jacob Agnew, Keith Falk, Tanner Bradley, Tyler Fetkenaur, Lev Kornilov, Branden Schlieff, and farm manager, Jason Yurs. Not pictured is Megan Lundy.

slower to show enthusiasm. After about a week or so, we tried to quit going up in the holding pen to get cows in. At that point, we started being the stubborn ones, waiting out the cows, and letting peer pressure and the crowd gate do the job.

About 185 cows have been purchased over the past four years, most directly from other breeders. Since we're a Johne's-vaccinated herd, all cows had to be TB tested. We worked with sellers to get bulk tank cultures and Johne's tests . . . either milk or rapid fecal. All cows got an modified live IBR/PI3 vaccine nasally before being shipped and some were given a killed 9-way vaccination. Cost of these tests and vaccinations were worked into the purchase price one way or another.

Most cows received a killed, 10-way vaccination upon arrival. Following some breeding problems, we tested 10 cows for *Lepto hardjo*. We had one positive, so we vaccinated the cows in milk at the time and gave tetracycline sub-Q at dry-off. Now our heifers are vaccinated for *Lepto hardjo*.

old facilities (main herd in tie stall barn; switch cows on bedded packs) and our fall 2007 test days.

Looking at the two sets of fall test days eliminates seasonal differences and reflects this past fall's test days after cows have had a chance to adjust to the new facilities.

We'd have to say things have gone fairly well. Through our own heifers and buying cattle, we are milking 130 more than last fall. We've added about 5 pounds to management level milk (MLM), 4 pounds to test-day milk, and 0.35 pound of combined fat and protein.

We weren't bragging about where we were on somatic cells a year ago. We were not treating a lot of clinical cases, but we had trouble putting our finger on why we were running in the mid- to upper-300s. Cows may not have adjusted well to the new, variable-speed pump we had installed in the old barn. Plus, having the switch cows in pack barns was not ideal. However, SCCs of the barn cows and switch cows were not greatly different.

Somatic cell levels in the mid-