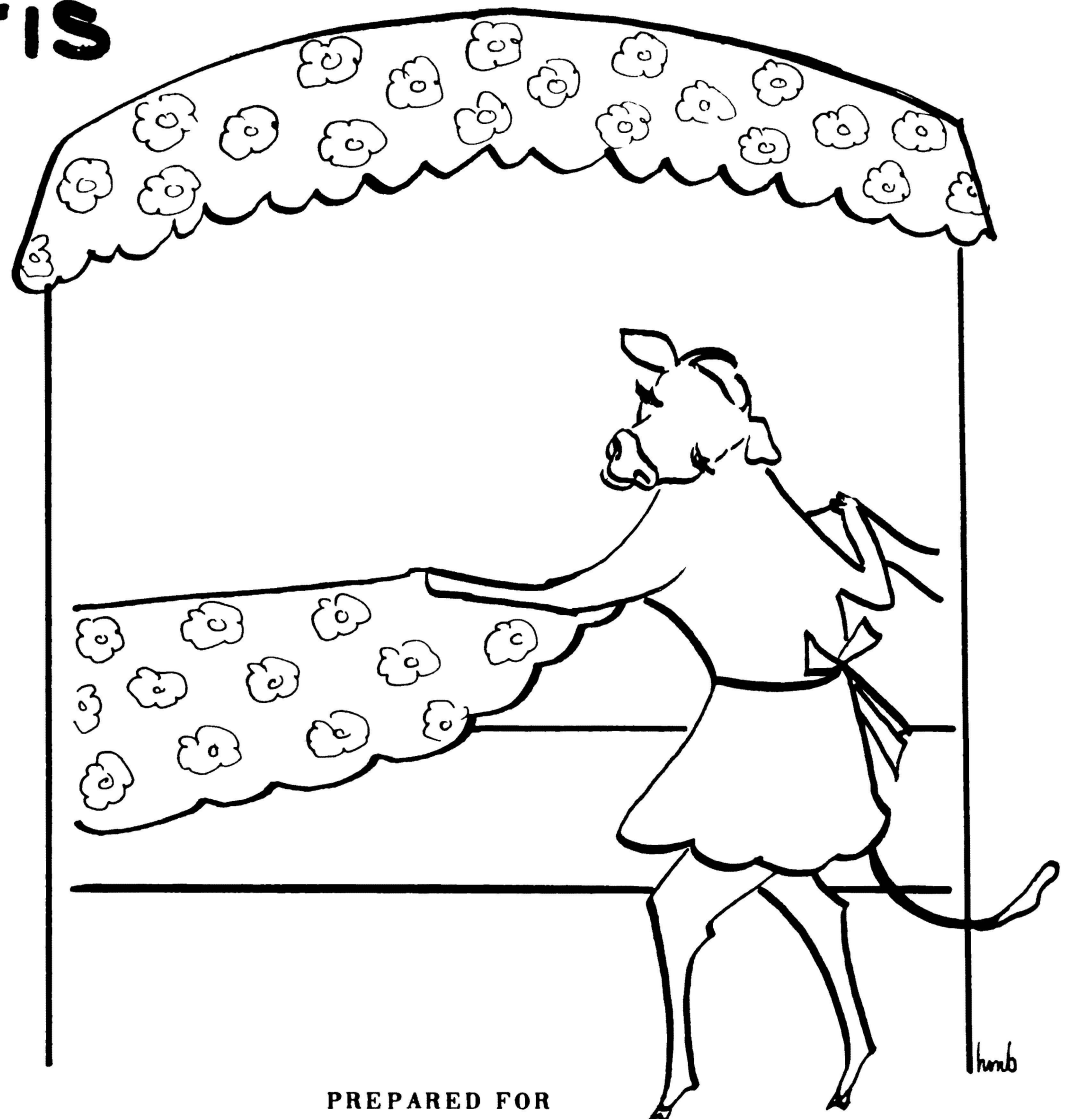


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A good bed helps prevent mastitis



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A good bed helps prevent mastitis

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Did you ever wake up with a stiff neck or sore throat after sleeping in a draft or with too few blankets? Most of us have, and we are pretty prompt to correct the situation by bedtime the next night. We do not do our best when we wake up stiff and sore.

Yes sir, you are generally pretty fussy about your own sleeping accommodations. But, how about the sleeping accommodations of your dairy cows? Do you give them the proper consideration? Your cows, just like you, cannot be expected to do their best if exposed to damp bedding or drafty areas. In fact, their health and production will probably suffer more than yours, because they are expected to work harder and for longer hours than you do.

The cow is completely at your mercy in this respect because she has to live with what you provide. It is important that you look after the animal's bedding needs every day, just as you do all the other routine daily chores. Failure to do this even for one day may create a stress situation that can lead to mastitis in some cows.

A few simple daily checks will help to avoid such stress. These are:

1. Amount of Bedding There should be at least 4 to 6 inches of clean bedding on the floor of the lounging area and enough in the stalls to keep the cow off the concrete when she is lying down.
2. Condition of Bedding Good drainage in the loafing area is essential to keep the bedding dry and to eliminate breeding places for germs and flies. You may need to remove the manure from stall barns twice daily to keep the bedded area clean and dry.

3. Ventilation Drafty conditions are much worse than steady cold. Actually, the cow does very well in cold weather if she can move around and choose her own bedding place in a clean, draft-free area. High humidity quickly develops in poorly ventilated stall barns. This dampness is especially serious during cold or changing winter weather.

Having too little space per cow often leads to costly injuries followed by mastitis. Loafing areas should provide 60 to 80 square feet per cow. Stalls and stanchions should be large enough to accommodate the animal. If they are not, you will need to give more individual attention in order to prevent injury.

There is another place where good bedding conditions are important. If your cows spend a good portion of their day outdoors during the winter, they are bound to lie down. Good managers provide a comfortable resting area during the daytime as well as at night.

Enough good bedding, proper ventilation, and enough space are important for all dairy cows. However, considerably more care must be given to heavy-producing, large-uddered cows. They are already under stress because of high production and often have less resistance to mastitis than lower producing animals.

Careful daily attention to these few details takes little time and involves little, if any, extra cost. It can, however, eliminate one of the most common conditions associated with costly mastitis.