

# Check that needs of animals are met

**O**VER the past generation, the production levels of animals, especially dairy cows, has increased dramatically. Maybe now is the time to ask searching questions to see if the animals' needs are being met.

**I've expanded my dairy herd, but then production per cow seems to be going down.**

In our experience, this is an all-too-common scenario. There are many causes, but top of the list should be the cow accommodation. Herds have not only expanded commonly in the past decade, but adult dairy cows have got bigger too.

It might seem blindingly obvious, but the fact of the matter is that it is often not acted on. Build a cubicle bed, which is big enough for one cow, then multiply it up.

These dimensions should

## VETERINARY ADVICE

**Richard Knight**, of Westmorland Veterinary Group, explains that thinking your way round a problem can be as effective as spending money on it

be based on how big your cows are, not off-the-peg norms.

For example, the bed length should be from her brisket to her pin bones (plus lungeing space). The bed width should be twice her width at the points of her hips, with any neck rail being at least 85 per cent, the height of her withers.

**I could consider that, but I'm stuck with the rest of the set-up**

You'll be surprised what you can think your way around and out of. It's true that a well-made farm building can be a curse.

It would be great if many of them fell down after ten

to 15 years, so that you could build a better one for your livestock. We run CowSignals meetings where a group of farmers can critically appraise the buildings, using the cows to tell them through their behaviour, and highlight improvement points.

Usually a light-bulb moment occurs when things are laid bare in front of peers. Every problem must be accompanied by a solution, though.

**Surely, that sort of outlay is expensive?**

Rarely can you spend your way out of trouble. At one extreme, a new shed is expensive, but is not avail-

able to most in the short term. Thinking your way out is cheaper, using relatively low-cost solutions, such as removing walls, altering cow flow, improving ventilation, improving feed and water access, and altering cubicle dimensions.

As vets, we appreciate that cash flow and margins dictate what gets spent and when, but investment in keeping your main income generators happy pays you back in pounds. Happy cows equals happy farmers.

### ADVICE:

Richard Knight,  
of the  
Westmorland  
Veterinary Group

