

Farm Modernisation Science

Decision time on livestock bedding

By Seamus O'Callaghan B.Agr. Sc.

THE time to house cattle arrives faster for farmers than they sometimes think. Busy with silage in May and June, farmers should allow themselves plenty of time to plan important decisions about investing in slatted rubber and cubicle mats as bedding for slatted houses and cubicles.

July and August are the ideal months to make progress with erecting new buildings, altering existing sheds and installing mats and other ancillary equipment.

While the recession and the credit crunch will increase the supply of labour and make it easier to get jobs done, it also means that quality products such as slatted rubber and cubicle mats may not be as readily available as heretofore and have to be ordered in good time to ensure you have them when required.

Over the years farmers have used many different systems to provide comfortable housing setups for animals over the winter months. These have included loose housing with straw, sawdust, sand and cubicles with clay and lime.

While loose housing appears to be the most comfortable for the animals, difficulties were experienced with high labour maintenance costs and there was also the problem of maintaining hygienic areas free



■ ABOVE: Double tank with four pieces 1.9m end to end of Durapak Slatted Rubber.

from disease causing organisms.

The advent of concrete slats and cubicles overcame the above problems. However, because concrete is so hard, there were difficulties with animals getting knee and hock damage resulting in stress and lameness problems. And obviously resulting in poor performance.

Initially farmers attempted to overcome this problem by installing hard mats which had excellent insulating characteristics but had very little

comfort. Farmers also found it difficult to make decisions on which mat to purchase as very little independent trial data existed.

In recent years this has changed as newer, softer, warmer and better designed mats have resulted in greater comfort for beef cattle and dairy cows which has resulted in greatly increased production performance.

In 2006 and 2007, the Dept of Agriculture in the South (Teagasc) carried out an extensive beef trial comparing 360 beef bullocks using

three different slatted mats, out-wintering pads and bare concrete slats.

Durapak Slatted Rubber came out on top with 14kgs of extra carcass weight over and above bare concrete slats and together with a higher carcass classification was worth between \$40-\$45 per head of animal.

In addition, investing in the Durapak product returns between two and five times more money to the farmer than the two well-known competitor products.

The bottom line shows that Durapak returns \$400 to the farmers per annum for a pen of 10 cattle compared to Mat B (£75) which performs at only 20 per cent that of the Durapak product. Mat C is also out-performed by Durapak delivering about \$175 extra to the farmer for a pen of ten cattle.

The final results of the Green Beef Trials are due to be published shortly and farmers will have an independent Trial to assist them in making their decisions. In the case of cubicle mats no such trial data exists and with at least 10 different mats/carpet on the market, farmers are faced with making difficult decisions.

Cubicle mats can be broadly divided into three categories as follow: EVA warm type e.g. Durapak; Carpets / Mattresses; Conveyor belt / hard rubber.

In practice between 80-90 per cent of cubicle mats being fitted on farms

are of the EVA type and most experts agree that they offer the best value for money. However, we need to issue a word of caution here as there are very significant differences within this category.

In an effort to reduce the cost of production, some manufacturers include limestone or chalk or other fillers in EVA type mats. While incorporating limestone reduces the cost of manufacture, it has the disadvantage of making the mat harder and less attractive for the animals to lie on.

Durapak cubicle mats are manufactured with high grade EVA compound and are totally devoid of all types of filler. Durapak cubicle mats are soft, warm and comfortable and encourage animals to lie down more often and for longer periods than most other mats.

Durapak cubicle mats are between 10-20 per cent thicker than most mats on the market. The Durapak mat specification is 20-22mm in thickness. Most other mats are either 18-20mm or 15-18mm in thickness.

In conclusion the Department of Agriculture in the South (Teagasc) has done farmers a major service by conducting independent trials which will help them make a decision. As there are major differences in thickness, softness, durability and return on investment, it is important that farmers make informed decisions when spending their money.

"We found Durapak Slatted Rubber easy to install and versatile in use. We used it in a creep area for calves and found it saved us a lot in straw costs over the winter months. We were able to also use it for fattening beef bulls in the summer and we found it increased daily liveweight gains and we had virtually no lameness with the animals"

- Derek Dunn, Strabane, County Tyrone.

"Since we installed Durapak Slatted Rubber, we have found a lot less stiffness and animals are more comfortable and find it much easier to get up"

- Alwyn Davies, Aberystwyth, Wales.

What farmers say . .

"We have experienced a big reduction in lameness in beef bullocks; while the animals might be a wee bit dirtier, they are more comfortable and perform a lot better"

- John Neill, Carbery, County Kildare.

"We are extremely happy with the performance of our fattening dry cows since we installed Durapak Slatted Rubber the comfort is unreal"

- Donald and Martin Vaughan, Broadford, County Clare.

The benefits of Durapak slatted rubber . . .

- Animals gain more weight - (See Teagasc Trial Results where Durapak Slatted Rubber came out on top with 14kgs of extra carcass weight over and above bare concrete slats and together with a higher carcass classification was worth between €45 - €55 per head of animal).
- Durapak Slatted Rubber combines the ideal balance between the softness and comfort characteristics, and the long lasting durable properties necessary for use over a long number of years.
- Durapak Slatted Rubber is manufactured from high quality natural rubber which is soft and

- comfortable - reducing stress and lameness, thus increasing daily liveweight gains in fattening cattle.
- Durapak Slatted Rubber with its unique core wedge is suitable for use with a wider range of gap widths - more flexible for fitting purposes
- Suitable for all types of slats including new and used slats.
- Ideal solution for slippery slats.
- Less lameness.
- Less stress.
- Three times more grip.
- More comfortable, livelier animals.



Durapak

for Animal Comfort and Crop Packaging



3 Piece Slatted Rubber

Durapak Tops Dept of Agr. Beef Trials
Extra Value per Animal - over £50

BENEFITS

- * Reduced Stress & lameness
- * Ideal for Slippery Slats
- * Grande Results - 14kg extra carcass weight
- * Cored wedge - more flexible for installation purposes

Also Durapak Cubicle mats and Calf Slats

Contact DurapakAgri

Free Phone 0800 085 3277

Email: info@durapakagri.ie Website: www.durapakagri.ie