

OLD CYNIC GETS EXCITED ABOUT COWTIME

After 40 years of milking cows, Derris Koch could be forgiven for saying the excitement had faded over time. A 'cynical old bugger' by his own admission, Derris recently found himself bursting with excitement after an evening milking. He'd literally 'seen the light'.

Having attended CowTime's Shed Shake-up earlier that day, Derris spent the milking looking at the dairy from a cow's point of view.

"It was like looking at the shed for the first time! I found a simple solution to a problem that had been puzzling us for quite a while. So many things suddenly made sense that I got really excited. And those who know me will tell you I'm not a very excitable person - it takes a lot to get me in that state," said Derris.

The Shed Shake-up - CowTime's field day with a difference - had focused on ways to use the animal's natural instincts to improve cow flow through the dairy. "It was all about cow psychology and it is so obvious once you understand the way a cow behaves," said Derris.

He quickly put his excitement into action, making several simple changes at virtually no cost but the difference has been remarkable.

Derris and his wife Maureen farm in partnership with their son Jason, at their property at Lyndoch on the southern tip of South Australia's Barossa Valley. With a year round calving herd, they usually milk about 165 cows in a 14-unit swing-over herringbone. Derris and Jason share the responsibility of milking, most of the time with a single operator. A typical milking takes about an hour and a half, or up to two hours when production peaks in spring.

"Although we are reasonably happy with our dairy, the cows always hesitated before coming onto one of the sides. We'd have to chase the cows onto that side whereas they flowed smoothly onto the other side," said Derris.

One of the topics discussed at the Shed Shake-up was cow vision. "When they started talking about how sensitive cows are to light, I started thinking about that platform."



Derris Koch

Derris went home and stood in the yard looking towards the problem platform, and was nearly blinded by the afternoon sunlight shining through a gap between two rooflines. "It was so obvious that I wondered why we hadn't worked it out before."

The solution was simple: it took less than two hours to install shade cloth across the gap and it cost nothing because the shade cloth was in the shed. The difference was instant. The following milking, the cows entered the side without hesitating.

On a dark morning, the cows also hesitated at a certain point in a raceway leading up to the dairy yard. After the Shed Shake-up Derris realised a strong light shone directly into the cows eyes at this point. A simple adjustment to the angle of the light has improved cow flow into the yard.

Derris believes the Shed Shake-up gave many participants a much-needed boost at a time when finances are tight. "It's great to make low cost changes that make a real difference. The on-farm, informal format of the Shed Shake-up gave us plenty of opportunity to discuss our own situation so everyone was able to pick up ideas to take home and put into action."

CowTime's Shed Shake-ups were brought to South Australia by Dairy SA.

For more information phone CowTime on 03 5624 2221. CowTime is proudly supported by Dairy Australia and DPI Vic. Your Dairy Services levy making milking easier.