



## **Cow flow and Facilities**

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### **Tracks**

The design of tracks determines the voluntary walking speed of the herd. Where cows have a well drained, non abrasive surface to walk on that is wide enough for the size of the herd the average flow rate may be up to 4.5km per hour.

The most common problem area of tracks is at the junction with concrete. Water pools, fine materials are washed away and gravel is carried onto the concrete. Cow flow dramatically slows down if this area is not maintained.

Sharp bends and narrowing of the track, loss of the fine top layer, poor drainage and gravel on concrete all cause disruption to the flow of a herd.

### **Collecting yard and milking parlour**

The most common problems with the collecting yards are

- i) The entrance is in the wrong place in relation to the bail entry.
- ii) The collecting yard is too small for the number of cows ( min 1.5 sq m per cow)
- iii) The concrete is slippery.
- iv) Concrete slopes are too steep.
- v) Sideways slope of the concrete approaching the milking parlour or on the exit.
- vi) Sharp bends.
- vii) Dark sheds.
- viii) Stray electricity.
- ix) Poor gate designs – motorised backing gates that are too fast (12m/min in round yards, 6 m per min in rectangular yards).
- x) Sharp turns at the exit from the bails.
- xi) Pipework that will injure hips.

Where there are design problems on the track and in the milking parlour area it is still possible to achieve reasonable cow flow if the stockmen understand where the problems are. Patience is the answer until the facility can be upgraded.

Because cows are “creatures of habit” improvements in stockmanship will not result in immediate improvement in cow flow. Our experience is that retraining usually takes 4 to 6 weeks of determination with the older cows. The younger cows learn more quickly.

Both the facilities and stockmanship are vital elements in achieving good cow flow, and in lameness management.