



A dairy farmer feeding cattle in a zero grazing shelter. PHOTOS BY DAVID MAFABI

# Why you should have a shelter for your cattle

To meet basic needs of dairy animals, farmers are advised to construct a simple shelter for cattle. According to experts, cattle which sleep well will give more milk and the best meat, writes **Beatrice Nakibuuka**.

As a cattle owner, sheds are necessary to provide homes for the cows where they can thrive and grow.

Although many zero grazing cattle are left outside and only have a boundary around them, it is essential to provide proper shelter for them as well.

Healthy cattle can tolerate extremes of temperatures if they adapt and have adequate feeding and plenty of water.

However, shelter can improve the welfare of the cattle and reduce production losses.

Animals without shelter need to put more energy into normal functioning and less into production.

Whether you have chosen to do zero grazing or paddock system, it is your responsibility to provide them with a healthy and comfortable environment according to Dr David Galiwango, a vet at Conceed. The provision of shelter allows cattle to better cope with the varying climatic changes such as strong rainy seasons. The barn should be served by an all-weather driveway, border and a well-drained service yard.

### Floor

One of the most important factors that should be considered while constructing a cattle shelter, although most neglect it, is the type of flooring. It is therefore important to note that choosing a wrong type of floor puts your cows at risk of injury in the long run. Dr Galiwango says, "One of the most prevalent problems for farmers and their cattle is lameness. Bad floors usually contribute largely to this because hard surfaces can damage cow hooves. This causes long term damage to their legs so installing a high-quality floor is important in preventing this problem."

A good floor for a cattle shelter should be relatively dry and easy to maintain; comfortable surface and footing that are not too hard on the cows' hooves and durable enough to be able to remain intact and withstand the cattle's weight for a long time. There are various flooring options for cattle shelters but concrete and wood floors are the most popular. Miriam Ankunda, a vet assistant at Shimmer Africa notes however that, hard concrete flooring is bad because it is too hard on the hooves and in the long run will cause lameness among the cattle. Ankunda says, "While you install the floor in a cow's shelter, make sure it is not very hard but retain the solidity of the ground. Having a flat or smooth surface between grooves also aids in making the best flooring possible."

The floor of the cow's shelter must meet the specifications of being dry, comfortable and durable. The shape of the floor is also important. Most cow sheds have sloping floors which allow water runoff to drain easier. It is a good idea to include some slight sloping on your flooring because it will also make the barn or shed easier to clean when washing down. However, you have to be careful not to put too much elevation or else the cows will have a harder time walking through.

### Spacing and roof

To avoid overcrowding the shelter, the farmer must know that an average dairy cow needs about 100-125 sq. ft for shelter and there should be about five metre spacing between the animals within the paddocks.

The roof to shelter the cows from rain is important but should be made from materials that will not cause heat distress to the animals. For purposes of cost cutting, one can use papyrus mats and polythene bags for roofing.

### Quality of air

For a good cow shelter, proper light, sun, air and hygienic disposal of excreta should be available. If a former human shelter is used for cattle or any other animal housing, it is usually too warm and unhealthy for animals. Henry Nsereko, a vet at Conceed says buildings with windows and doors covered are often poorly ventilated. This situation may result in a buildup of moisture and animal odours, creating an unhealthy environment. Nsereko says, "A good cattle shelter should be open to allow for natural ventilation. Ensure that there is sufficient air and light inside the house to help keep the house dry and prevent germs or virus multiplication. Tight buildings result in a buildup of respiration gases and animal odors, which can irritate the animals' lungs and cause pneumonia."

### Feedlots

Kanyike advises that feedlots for cattle should be sheltered from

adverse weather conditions which are likely to cause cold stress or heat stress. The farmer must provide a shade or alternative means of cooling for the cows. "The cattle should therefore be constantly monitored for signs of restlessness, decreased food intake or clustering around water troughs which usually indicate thermal load stress requiring immediate action," he says.

### Calves

Calves can be raised in individual hutches according to Ankunda where they can move around, be fed individually, and allow for good ventilation and ease of cleaning. The shelter should have a well-draining material, such as a layer of sand, gravel, or stone for proper drainage.

At weaning, or about eight weeks of age, calves outgrow hutches and need to be moved to alternative housing. Avoid housing systems that place calves on cold concrete.

## SHS5M

AMOUNT OF MONEY REQUIRED TO BUILD THE SMALLEST UNIT FOR ANIMALS.

### Zero or paddocks graze

You may only be limited by space but doing paddock and zero grazing at the same time is very possible.

Henry Kanyike, a dairy farmer says he chose to do semi zero grazing where he has paddocks for his cows but also leaves them to graze on their own at some point. He however says that such an idea requires one to have plenty of farm land.

He says, "I basically do semi zero grazing because I have a paddocked shelter for the cows to protect them from heavy rains and extreme hot weather, a milking shelter and store for the feeds but they move around also during day."

### Costs

To construct a basic shelter, a farmer needs iron sheets, cement, timber, poles and sand. "You must have a minimum of Shs5m for the smallest unit," says Musa Kafeero a dairy farmer in Luwero District.

### TIPS FOR BUILDING A DAIRY SHELTER

Cattle need shelter like other animals in inclement weather.

So you have to provide a suitable shelter where your animals can get a hedge against cold and rain.

Cattle are very sensitive to cold and water. They can get pneumonia if you keep them in a wet or cold place, and pneumonia can be fatal for your animals. So providing shelter is very important for protecting your animals from cold and wet.

Cattle are not fussy and they do not require any elaborate shelter setup.

They just need a sturdy one that can provide them adequate protection against cold and wet.

Building a suitable and comfortable shelter for cattle is absolutely very easy.

Even, you can setup a complete cattle shelter together within an afternoon.

Below we are describing more about cattle shelter types and the steps on how to build a goat shelter.

### CATTLE PANEL SHELTER

Livestock or cattle panels provide good shelter for animals in form of a half moon shelter.

Creating such a shelter is very easy. You can create a panel shelter in a fixed location with a wooden frame or T-posts.

These types of shelters are portable. You can move the shelters from one place to another, if you want or need to. For erecting panels with T-posts, follow the steps listed below.

• First of all place a cattle panel flat on the ground.

• Position two T-posts at any of the short ends (on either side of the panel and close against it, and drive them into the ground).

• Position two additional T-posts in line with the others, 6 feet away (creating a square) after moving the cattle panel out of the way.

• Lift the cattle panel and position the one short end up against the first two T-posts.

• For bending the other end up between the second two T-posts,

bend the panel and create a half-moon.

• You can secure the panel to the T-posts by using zip ties or twine.

• For better protection from precipitation, cover the expanse with the half-moon frame with heavy duty tarp (secure it with twine).

• You have to use additional cattle panels for larger shelters

• For creating walls, attach pallets together.

• Cover the pallets for preventing rain and wind from coming in the state.

• You can cover the pallets with plywood or tarps.

• Stack pallets longwise, one's end atop another.

Source: Roysfarm.com