

Effect of space allowance and floor type on 1) the welfare and performance of finishing beef steers (RMIS 6675)

The main critical points for cattle welfare during housing have been identified by EFSA (2006a; 2006b; 2009; 2012), the European Commission (2001) and the EU Welfare Quality® project (2009), these include; housing conditions, areas for feeding, walking and resting, space allowance and flooring, social and maternal behaviour, dominance, grouping, and re-grouping of animals. Most recently, concern for the welfare of finishing cattle, particularly in relation to housing conditions (space allocation and floor type), has been expressed at National, EU and OIE level. There is the view that conventional slatted floors without access to lying-areas should be replaced by more 'animal-friendly' systems. Currently, there are more than 60,000 slatted floor units in operation in Ireland. Thus the overall objective of the present project is to evaluate the impact of housing characteristics (mainly, increased space allocation and floor type) on animal welfare and performance of beef cattle over a 5-month winter finishing period. The combined effect of the space allowance per animal, the presence of slatted flooring with and without rubber mats, environmental conditions on the welfare and performance of cattle will be quantified using controlled studies. Behavioural, physiological and immunological responses of beef finishing steers will be quantified during and following housing for a 5 month winter period. A series of studies will address the following specific objectives; 1). To evaluate the effect of floor type (rubber mats versus slats) and space allowance (3.0 and 6.0 m²/hd) on the welfare of finishing steers. 2). To evaluate the effect of floor type (straw versus slats) and space allowance (3.0, 4.5 and 6.0 m²/hd) on the welfare of finishing steers.

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