



The speed of a rotary parlour can be regulated, giving the milker time to prepare each cow and attach the milking unit

The right parlour for the job

by Lynette Louw

The milking parlour is a specialised facility that can increase a farm's milk production and profits. However, a milking parlour can only be successful if it is well-designed, and provides a good environment in which the cow can be milked and the milking team can deliver their best work.

When choosing a milking parlour, there are a few things to bear in mind. First of all, the type of parlour will depend on the size of the milking herd. Secondly, cost and size are two factors that go hand in hand. For example, a milking parlour that is sized for use only four to six hours per day, will be more expensive to build and operate per cow, than a parlour which operates 20 to 21 hours per day.

The formation in which cows stand in the parlour, or the shape of the formations in which they are grouped, indicate the name of the type of milking parlour. The following are the most common milking parlour types used in South Africa.

Herringbone milking parlours

This parlour requires the use of an operator pit. Cows enter in groups (usually of no more than 12) and stand at an angle to the pit. No side passages are necessary. They are usually milked from the side. In a double-sided herringbone parlour, about 308 cows can be milked in two hours. With centrally-mounted units milking 12 cows at a time, about 200 cows can be milked in two hours.

Advantages

- Construction is cheaper than other parlours and requires less maintenance.
- Milking machine installation is simple and the parlour is easy to clean.
- The system is ideal for an expanding herd.
- Milkers do not get as tired while milking, because the udders are only about a metre apart.

Disadvantages

- A slow milker can hold up a batch of cows.
- Udders are further away from the operator than in tandem side-gate parlours.
- Less individual attention is given to cows.

Tandem side-gate parlours

If the site is level, cows are elevated by means of steps or ramps. This means that the operators do not have to bend as much while milking. If there is no elevation, then a pit can be provided for the milkers. The parlour consists of side passages with individual stalls off the passages. Cows stand head to tail alongside the edge of the pit (behind each other). This parlour is suitable for herds of 10 to 200 cows.

Advantages

- Milkers can enjoy a more even pace of work.
- Cows are handled individually.
- Slow milkers will not delay other cows.
- One whole side of the cow is visible for inspection purposes.

Disadvantages

- The parlour area is much more expensive and larger than a herringbone system.
- Six separate gate operations are necessary per cow.



The herringbone parlour is one of the most popular milking systems. This is a double-sided herringbone parlour, which clearly illustrates the operator pit from which the milker works

- The stall gates are expensive to install and are quite noisy.
- Operators can become quite tired, due to udders being almost 2,5 metres apart.
- A large area has to be washed and the upright stall construction can make cleaning difficult.

Rotary milking parlours

Cows are milked on a rotating, elevated circular platform. Cows stand in an abreast formation. They can face towards the inner or the outer edge of the platform. The abreast type takes up the least space per number of cows milked. The milker stands in one place outside the platform and the cows are moved to him.

The platform speed can be regulated, giving the milker time to prepare each cow and attach a milking unit. Up to 40 cows can be milked on a rotary unit. Rotary parlours normally consist of a circular steel platform. The platform rotates on rollers and is driven by electric or hydraulic motors.



The tandem sidegate parlour is suitable for smaller herds, but can accommodate up to 200 cows



The basic swingover herringbone parlour is very popular in pasture-based dairy farming

Advantages

- This parlour accommodates a steady output of cows.
- Operators do not have to walk much.

Disadvantages

- This system is quite expensive to maintain.
- There is a big risk of mechanical failure, which can halt the entire milking process.
- The rotary parlour cannot be expanded as far as building is concerned.
- Over-milking or under-milking can occur. 