Cover-up appeals to the cows

Kiwi invention is offering more 'dry' options

By Mike Barrington

Herd Homes can now help dairy farmers to cover feed pads or take other options to provide dry stand-off areas to prevent cows pugging paddocks in wet weather.

The firm can cover a range of existing feed pads, put new life into old barns and cover high stock areas to end waste-water problems.

Herd Homes were invented by Ruakaka dairy farmers Tom and Kathy Pow, who developed the slatted, removable concrete floor which enables dairy effluent to be collected in a basement from where — with the floor segments removed — it can be periodically cleared and used to fertilise paddocks.

Development has since continued throughout New Zealand with the help of farmers and AgResearch NZ and the Herd Homes concept is catching on overseas with strong interest in Australia, Britain and South America.

The erection of a Herd Home 60m long, 10m wide and with a basement, side and end walls could cost up to $310,000, depending on its locality. A roof over an existing feed pad the same size could cost up to $80,000.

A Herd Home-covered feed pad at Lew Ringrose's 100ha farm milking 240 cows at Hikurangi used to have a sealed clay floor overlaid with woodchip. It was stripped back to the clay and covered with a layer of compressed limestone.

BETTER BOVINES: Glen Redwood says cows like being on the covered feedpad and run to get to it. PHOTO/JOHN STONE

Herd Homes' newly developed roof with industrial frames strong enough for steel cladding but still covered in clear plastic was then erected over the site.

The roof has a 14m span, is 42m long and has a minimum height of 4m. The firm can build to a span of 16m and roofs can be any length.

The roof height allows tractors to be driven around to feed out or to scrape effluent from the floor and into a 3m deep pit, which is often covered to keep rain off it.

With the roof and side walls covered with plastic and the end sections open, air continually circulates through the building and effluent scraped off the floor in the morning is dry by the afternoon.

Fluid in the effluent in the pit seeps downhill to the milking shed treatment ponds. Solid material left in the pit is removed by a digger in summer and spread over paddocks in a slurry.

Ringrose farm sharemilker Glen Redwood said use of the covered feedpad since about June had improved farm operations.

"This is quite a wet farm and having a covered pad is perfect for getting the cows off the paddocks."

Glen Redwood, sharemilker

"It's much easier having calving cows in here in winter rather than out in the paddocks in mud," he said.

"This is quite a wet farm and having a covered pad is perfect for getting the cows off the paddocks.

"They like being under cover — they run to get in here."

Mr Pow told the *Rural Advocate* effluent was a valuable resource on farms, not a waste product that caused pollution.

Pollution was most likely to happen when water entered the effluent catchment or storage areas, he warned, emphasising that excluding rain or cleaning water [hosing or back flush] from effluent catchment and storage areas was a must.

"The payback to the farmer is obvious as no effluent nutrients are lost, spreading is by a contractor and the farmer only needs a scraper attachment for his tractor," Mr Pow said.

"This means a lot less heartbreak than looking after pumps, choppers and irrigation components."