

Greenhousing Dairy Cattle

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Greenhouses aren't just for plants any more! Now you can find calves, heifers, dry cows, milk cows, sheep, hogs, and chickens under them, too. With a goal of cutting capital costs for facilities, some farmers are turning to greenhouse suppliers to provide housing for their livestock. More and more farmers are trying this novel idea in their operations.

Even under a greenhouse, there still needs to be good design for space use and animal comfort. Greenhouses for young calves can provide a much nicer environment for the operator, but that environment must also be beneficial to the calves. Free stall barns with outside feeding and bedded packs for dry cows are also being designed using greenhouses.

When comparing cost of greenhouse frames to post frames for housing, make sure you are comparing the same type of system and are including all the costs. The shell of a greenhouse may seem pretty cheap, but that's not the total cost for housing. Additional site preparation, concrete, plumbing, and electrical work should also be considered in the price. For example, you can't compare the cost of plastic and steel materials for a greenhouse with costs for a constructed free stall barn-you are comparing apples and oranges. There are many ways to reduce capital cost for facilities, and greenhouses might be one of them. Just be a good consumer and shop around before making a decision to buy.

For more information and a cost analysis comparing several layouts for post frames and greenhouse frames, contact the Biological Systems Engineering Department at (608) 262-3310, or at email me at: dwkammel@facstaff.wisc.edu

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