

Barns Aren't for the Birds



Steve Adsmond

Northwest Michigan

Dairy Nutritionist

adsmond@vanbeeknutrition.com

As a nutrition consultant, there are two things I find counter productive 100% of the time to milk production. Flies and Birds. I despise both and have been on a mission to help producers get rid of both on dairy farms. This is easier said than done. It is hard to imagine now, but European Starlings were purposefully introduced into the United States from Europe. The effort failed twice before a successful introduction of about 60 birds was made in New York City's Central Park in 1890. What were those people thinking? Today, Audubon Societies consider the bird a nuisance and a threat to other cavity nesting birds that most people love, such as Blue Birds and Purple Martins.

I have long recommended the USDA program for getting rid of Starlings because they use a Starling specific bait called Starlicide. Starlicide will not kill other bird species, only Starlings, Grackles and Brown Headed Cowbirds. However, results of this program are variable, depending on how hungry the Starlings are, along with how bad the

weather happens to be at the moment the bait is fed. I have been involved with producers who have experienced kills of only 200 to as high as 20,000. Because of Starlings and my strong interests to keep them off the dairy, I have highly recommended bird free trusses as another barrier to minimize the invasion in the barns.

This past October, while at the World Dairy Expo, I wanted to get out to a dairy farm. I am always eager to learn better management tips used by producers and had an opportunity through Karl Burgi to visit a well managed dairy to look at cow hooves that get maintenance trimmed three times per lactation. What I got was a lot more. Maier Dairy has conventional trussed barns and no birds. Most striking to me when I walked into the cow barn was the clean trusses. One barn was only three years old, but the other barn was nearing thirteen years old and has no birds. This farm has put coated wire covering all side walls, eaves, and peak opening of both barns. On each barn the drive through alley doors at each end were wide open. The wire limits the quick exit routes for the birds and therefore limits the invitation to invasion in the first place. If the birds have no safety they will go to other places to thrive. The PVC coated hex wire was anchored behind the curtain on the outside of the post construction barn. On the inside of the posts was chain link fencing so the cows couldn't trash the hex wire or curtains.

After the visit, I contacted the catalog vendor Farm Tek to see what they of-

fered. They sell the PVC coated hex wire in wire widths from 1 ft. to 6 ft. at 150 ft. length. A 150 ft. roll of six foot coated hex wire costs \$254 while a two foot width costs \$110 for the same length. At these prices, a 300 ft. cow barn with 12 ft eaves and 2 ft ridge would cost about \$2,500 for material to wrap in PVC hex wire. If we look at the results from a farm study conducted by the USDA on a dairy in Michigan, this investment could have significant returns. The milk production difference before and after the USDA Starlicide program was implemented was over three pounds of milk per cow per day. This was repeated two times on the same farm in the same year, with results showing milk increasing over the next three weeks following both starling kills. Calculating three pound milk gain on a four row barn would only take 1- 1/2 months to recoup the investment of wrapping a barn in hex wire if the birds were limiting this much milk.

I'll close with a quote from a very wise man, John Quincy Adams: *If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.*



PVC coated hex wire anchored on the barn