

Dedicated planning for dairy housing

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The dedicated planning of dairy housing is the best time and money you can spend on contemplating the ins and outs of the system and its potential environmental and animal wellbeing outcomes, as well as a solid ROI.

Dairy housing is a category on its own; its certainly not the same as a cowshed. Dairy housing changes the farm system, and so all matters related to that change need to be carefully considered.

Many farmers start with talking to a builder, but in reality that is the last party one should talk to, as the housing infrastructure is possibly that last thing on the list to be worked on.

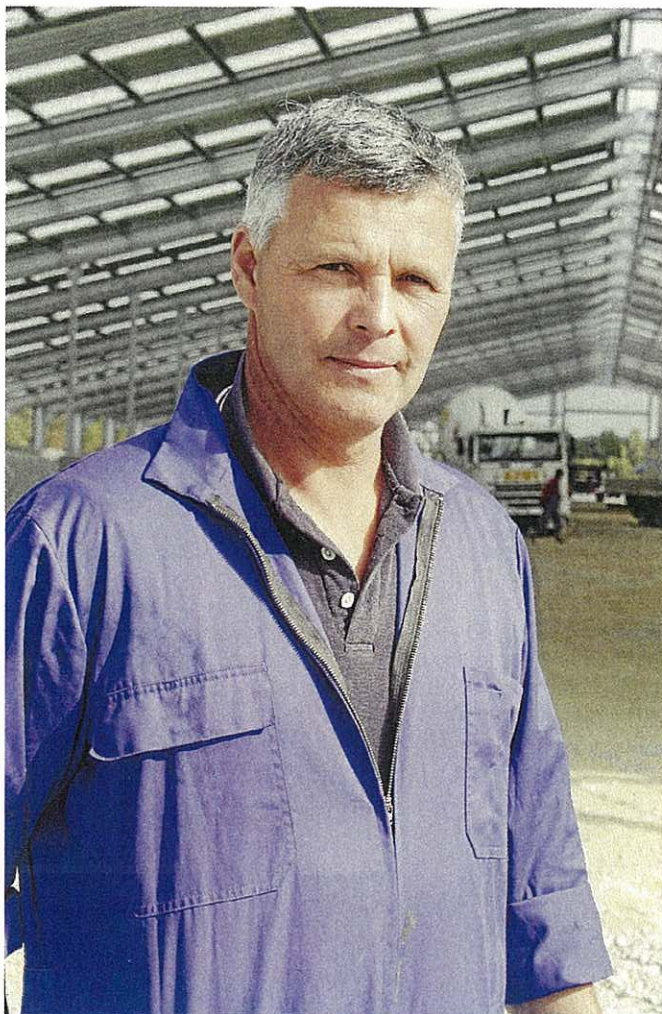
Very few builders know and understand farm systems and the integral details of dairy cows, let alone when we put them inside.

This precise issue is prevalent around the country. I see many farmers with a bundle of quotes from builders or dairy equipment providers rocking up to the bank. Unfortunately this often means they are sent home again as a pile of quotes mean nothing as no one actually spent time figuring out what is actually required and how it will all work and what the actual ROI and long term implications are on the farm system.

As Fonterra chair John Wilson states, be careful and consider the housing of cows carefully. To do that it's important to have good information and independent qualified advice.

Going to a builder or alternative provider with a general request for a quote on a dairy housing system is a bit like going to a car yard and asking for the price on a car – any car.

And asking for “the same shed as the guy down the



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road” is a bit like saying “I want a wife like the neighbor’s got” while in reality we all know that that would create some real nasty issues.

In my work as a dairy housing expert and consultant I spend time on farm working out what is actually needed to accommodate and resolve the key issues with the farmer and from that create a new farming system which may involve dairy housing.

If it does and it all stacks up, clear specifications are drawn up describing the project in what we call a project specification. This specification is what builders or construction companies

are then invited to price on or this can be used as a tender document. This means accurate pricing is received and quotes can be duly compared on an apple for apple basis.

Capability and reputation in managing large projects need to be considered too, as the building of large dairy housing projects is not a job for your average shed builder.

The expert builders in the business simply ask for a specification, disclose their capability, projects on hand and cost structures, so they can give you a quote which actually means something and which you can work with and have confidence in to

deliver your project on time.

As an example recently I have spent time with farmers who had quotes on the table ranging from 1.2 to 1.8 million for “complete” projects, yet when we had them price again on a detailed specification the price almost doubled . . . this exposed the strategy of “getting in at the lowest price” and work on the variables later to increase the price and of course their margin and profit. All with the best intention to deliver the project, but not best outcomes for the farmer who now faced the reality check on what the project really costs.

As a dairy housing expert and consultant I have over the last 8-10 years been on most freestall dairy housing systems in New Zealand, and visited many and varied systems overseas.

Together with Landward Management we have done well over \$300 million worth of project feasibilities, and thus understand very clearly what things cost and what the ROI are – and how things work.

I have worked with builders and contractors to help design smart and simple systems which add value and reduce construction time, thus reducing draw down time for the farmer and saving significant money in interest.

This information, expertise, knowledge and network base can make a significant contribution to a farmer’s project and result. It also means the bank is likely to see the project more favorably as all matters have been considered and costed out.

And when all said and done, all boxes ticked, then we push the button. Build time can be as short as 2-3 months before cows are in. Planning takes 8-12 months. Start now for autumn 2015 completion and delivery.