

## **Grazing: An Animal Welfare Issue for Automatic Milking Farms**

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Managing cows on pasture during the summer season is considered an important welfare issue in many countries. It contributes to improved health and wellbeing of the animals. Based on present limited information, the overall conclusion is that grazing can be integrated as part of management system including automatic milking of dairy cows. Research data and farm surveys have shown that systems for selecting cows leaving and entering the barn facilitate cow traffic and management. Drinking water and supplementary feeding in the barn stimulate the cows to return from the pasture voluntarily and at regular intervals. The cows shall preferably enter the barn individually or in small groups to avoid long waiting times at the entrance of the milking stall(s). A study conducted on three farms showed that 24-hour grazing systems resulted in lower milking frequency and lower yield compared with zero grazing or 12-hour grazing systems, but did not affect the economy due to lower feed costs. Short distances between the barn and the pasture are preferable. Long distances between the barn and the pasture generally affect milking frequency and yield negatively. Long distances can also influence the behaviour of animals. It has also been observed that animals can change their behaviour during the grazing season. It is important that these changes in behaviour are observed at an early stage so that management measures can be taken to counteract unfavourable effects on production results and animal health.