Ensuring water intake at high temperatures

High temperatures make life very challenging for dairy cows, with their metabolism soon reaching its limits. The effects of heat stress can, however, be reduced to a minimum with good barn management. For example, well-positioned fans ensure a good exchange of air in barns and cow sprinklers help to cool the animals down. One crucial factor is often overlooked though: Ensuring sufficient water intake.

Poor water intake means less milk

An insufficient water intake in high temperatures results in decreased feed intake and dairy cows producing less milk of poorer quality. This process occurs gradually over time. As such, signs of this are often not primarily associated with a lack of water.*

Demand for water increases enormously in high temperatures and with a high milk yield

As the milk yield increases, cows need to drink a lot more water. The temperature also has a significant impact on the amount of water required: For example, the water intake of a cow producing 36 kg of milk per day increases from 121 l at 15 °C to 147 l at 28 °C. On average, the total water intake is distributed over nine daily drinking bouts. Individual animals visit the drinking trough up to 26 times a day to get the necessary intake of daily fluids.*

Comfortable walkways support frequent water intake

Cows must go to the drinking trough by themselves in free stall barns. The higher the outside temperature and the higher the milk yield, the greater the demand for water and the more important it becomes to go to the watering point frequently. To make this journey easier for the animals, comfortable walking areas are necessary. For example, dairy cows are much more active on animal-friendly soft rubber mats in walking alleys and do not hesitate to visit key functional areas (such as drinking troughs).

*Source: DLG bulletin 399: Water supply for cattle – structural, technical and demand-oriented solutions.
Image: iStock, Candice Estep