



## ELEVATED FEED STALLS

Optimal feeding places  
for healthy hooves and  
improved feeding behavior



How do elevated feed stalls promote cow health and feeding behavior? Cows should spend at least 6 hours a day feeding. This usually occurs by itself when animals are in the pasture: Cows pick a place to graze and start feeding. Quite often a day-long pleasure. But things are very different in a barn: Cows have to actively seek out the feed stall before they can start feeding – predominantly while standing in one and the same place. A posture that can become very stressful for their hooves over time, especially as cows are normally in constant motion.

Beside this unnatural posture while eating, there are various other factors that can negatively affect the feeding behavior of cows in conventional feed stalls. They impact not only the optimal six-hour feeding period, but also **animal health** and ultimately the **profitability of a farm**. Let us take a look at the drawbacks of conventional ground level feed stalls in barns and explain the **benefits that elevated feed stalls offer in terms of enhancing the health and feeding behavior of your cows**.



## Conventional feeding places as a risk for hoof health and feeding readiness

At conventional feeding places, cows stand directly in the walking alley when feeding. Cows are feeding and eliminating feces and urine in the same space at the same time. This is not an ideal situation, especially in walking alleys with scraper manure removal: **During feeding, the walking alley becomes extremely dirty and the cows stand with their hooves in slurry**. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that this is bad for hoof health.

If the scraper removes manure from the walking alley while the cows are still feeding, two other disadvantages arise: The rear claws, in particular, are additionally soiled by the slurry being scraped off. Moreover, the scraper disrupts feed intake.

**Yet another danger for the hooves: Hard barn flooring, usually consisting of very abrasive concrete, can lead to one-sided wear of the hooves.** Incorrect loads and inflammation often ensue when hooves are worn down unevenly, potentially leading to animal lameness if not treated adequately.

For example, an **additional stress factor for animals** in conventional feed stalls is aggressive behavior and displacement at the feeding place. In feed stalls without dividers, lower-ranking animals are often displaced by higher-ranking ones, despite sufficient space being available. **The result: Lower-ranking animals fail to reach their full performance level.** Further, free spaces for feed intake are not used optimally as an insufficient number of animals eat at the same time. The full potential is not utilized!

### The good news:

Elevated feed stalls can solve these and other common problems of conventional barn feeding places. Let us take a closer look at the three solutions.

## Solution 1: Elevation of the feed stalls for enhancing health and feeding behavior

The first step to optimizing feeding behavior and improving hoof hygiene is to elevate feed stalls relative to the walking alley. The space between the step and the feeding place should enable **cows to stand comfortably on the elevation with all four hooves**, while ensuring that feces and urine are directed toward the walking alley.

Two major improvements are achieved with this type of elevation: Firstly, the actual feed stalls remain free of feces and urine. This represents a key **benefit for hoof hygiene**. Secondly, the scraper in the walking alley can efficiently remove slurry without disrupting or disturbing the feeding animals. Thus, elevating the feed stall **boosts long-term animal health and stimulates rapid improvements in feeding behavior**.



## Solution 2: Elevated feed stalls with soft barn mats for natural hoof loads

The issue of hoof load always presents a substantial health risk when cows are housed in barns. The reason for this is the anatomical shape of the cattle hoof. The outer claw is longer than the inner claw, meaning it is subjected to much greater loads and wear on hard, conventional concrete barn flooring. This results in incorrect loads and hoof diseases. The solution is soft rubber barn mats, such as KURA or profiKURA from KRAIBURG.

**Soft rubber floors have also proven their worth in feed stalls – after all, cows should spend as much time as possible there.** Rubber barn mats are also the best way to **improve standing comfort during feeding** and efficiently reduce the risk of hoof diseases caused by incorrect loads. The LENTA rubber mat from KRAIBURG is ideal for elevated feeding places. This measure promises significant advantages for both animal health and feeding behavior.



## Solution 3: Elevated feed stalls with dividers for less displacement at feeding places

Following successful implementation of the two initial structural solutions, which have greatly enhanced animal health and comfort, the task now is to **optimize distribution of the feeding places**.

**Dividers** have proven to be the ideal tool for this purpose. They ensure that cows cannot lie down or turn around at the feeding place – in other words, the animals cannot defecate against the boundary wall and the elevated feed stalls remain clean. Much more important, however, is their **role in protecting lower-ranking animals from higher-ranking ones**. As explained above, rank-related displacement at the feeding place leads to a noticeable deterioration in feed intake, as fewer animals eat at the same time. The dividers effectively reduce displacement while decisively improving use of the entire feeding place and the feeding behavior of lower-ranking animals in general.



## Summary:

When equipped properly, elevated feed stalls provide numerous short and long-term improvements

*Cows are grazing animals. So when it comes to keeping cows in barns, we have to go to great lengths to strike a balance between the health and welfare of the animals and the economic interests of the farm. **Elevating the feed stalls is a measure that has a double effect: In addition to enhancing animal feeding behavior and hygiene, it also secures lasting economic advantages.***

*However, in order for elevated feed stalls to reach their full potential, the respective equipment also needs to be considered during the planning phase. **Soft rubber barn mats and properly spaced dividers are essential additions** that should be planned and implemented from the start when constructing elevated feed stalls.*