

Dairy farmers should rethink a cow's curfew

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UBC animal welfare professors Dan Weary & Marina von Keyserlingk. Credit: UBC

Dairy cows housed indoors want to break curfew and roam free, suggests new research from the University of British Columbia, published today in *Scientific Reports*.

The study measured how much work dairy cows will do to [access](#) pasture, by pushing on a weighted gate. The cows worked hard to access pasture, especially at night. As a comparison, the researchers also measured how much weight the cows would push to access their regular [feed](#) when kept indoors; cows worked just as hard to go outside as they did to access fresh feed when they were hungry.

"Our findings show cows are highly motivated to be outside," said Marina von Keyserlingk, the study's lead author and an animal welfare professor in UBC's faculty of land and food systems.

von Keyserlingk said many [dairy](#) cows in Canada, the United States and other parts of the world are housed exclusively indoors. Indoor housing may meet the cow's basic needs for food, water, hygiene and shelter, but does not allow the cow to engage in natural behaviours.

"Improving the cow's quality of life is obviously important for the animal, but it's also important for the people involved, including the farmers that care for them and the consumers who buy [dairy products](#)," said co-author and UBC animal welfare professor Dan Weary.

The researchers said their findings support previous research that found public opinion of a good life for cattle involves outdoor grazing access.

The study, "Dairy cows value access to pasture as highly as fresh feed", was published today in *Scientific Reports*.

More information: Marina A. G. von Keyserlingk et al. Dairy cows value access to pasture as highly as fresh feed, *Scientific Reports* (2017). [DOI: 10.1038/srep44953](https://doi.org/10.1038/srep44953)

Provided by University of British Columbia

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