

Spotlight

BTU 2019 – positioning of livestock farming



**Prof. Dr.
Wolfgang Büscher**

Photo: private

“Construction”, “Engineering” and “Environment” (German initials: BTU) in livestock farming is the focus of September’s BTU Conference in Bonn. Such events should encourage the organisers to consider whether these terms are still up-to-date and relevant enough for target groups; to help them reassess their respective situations or, more colloquially, to consider resetting their compasses in this respect.

It has to be said of the fundamental subject “agricultural building construction” that comparatively little new building is taking place currently. After all, there is no guiding precise identification of the “livestock housing system of the future”. Too many expectations and demands burden the very heterogeneous considerations regarding livestock farming’s future. What society wants in this respect is far away from the experience-based measures that farmers see as practicable. The farm building construction sector, with its many firms specialised in livestock housing, suffers very much from this situation.

Adding to the difficulties here, and this leads us to the next key factor “environment”, is that building approval cannot be granted to many nature-near livestock housing systems with outside runs. This is because appropriate system-specific emission factors for calculation of the minimum distance to neighbouring communities, or ecosystems requiring protection, are simply not available. The large-scale collaborative projects “EmiDat” and “EmiMin” should fill this gap as soon as possible. Happily, a lot of urgently required research on emission minimising methods for livestock housing is currently being carried out. And these are also urgently necessary so that Germany remains able to abide by the international environmental policy agreements it has made. Considering the already mentioned lack of new building activity, actions aimed at fitting new technologies into existing buildings are in the position to meet the targets much faster.

The term “engineering” covers livestock housing equipment, which is in turn connected with the wellbeing of farm animals. After many years of discussions on animal protection, species-specific conditions and avoidance of stress, it is very clear that the wellbeing of animals dominates. Everyone agrees that increased animal welfare in housing is desirable – never forgetting, of course, its effects on building design technology and economic efficiency. At the very least, it is here that the full circle is completed because the renovation actions for improving livestock wellbeing are as a rule required under building permission and emission protection legislation.

But other themes of the future are also relevant. In the context of the animal welfare discussion, the positive effects of digitization are increasingly argued. Sensors and assistance systems can take

over tasks of comprehensive animal observation, documentation of process requirements and evidence-based management decision support.

On the subject of climate change, livestock production is all too often seen in the perpetrator role. However, here too, making adjustments to global warming is also an important theme for our conference. Long periods of heat should make us more aware of the role of cooling technologies in avoiding livestock stress and maintaining animal health through the summer season.

All these thoughts highlight that we are underway in exciting times and that great challenges still lie before us!



Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Büscher

Chair of Livestock Technology
Institute of Agricultural Engineering
University of Bonn