

Control Stress In Dairy Animals

BY T.L. SMITH

Psh. Vet Science Ext.

Animal stress is defined as an internal or environmental (external) stimulus that initiates an adaptive change or a stress response in an animal. Stress is an important consideration when we aim to increase production through promoting an animal's well being. Unfortunately, stress is a commonly ignored factor in many aspects of animal management.

Oftentimes, particularly in intensive confinement operations, animals' needs are not understood and therefore not met. This can alter immune response and influence the ability to thrive. So-called "stress" can induce biological changes that will affect normal development and growth, depress reproductive and productive performance, in addition to decreasing disease resistance. Stressful episodes are particularly dangerous in ruminants, as they can promote changes in gastrointestinal tract motility leading to bloat and diminished rumen function. Stressors having the most profound effect on animals are: heat, cold, weaning, crowding, mixing,

limit feeding, noise, and restraint. Suggestions for Decreasing Stress in Dairy Animals:

* Proper nutrition is crucial to alleviate physiological stress. Avoid rapid diet changes and deprivation of food or water. Providing regular feeding times helps to avoid social order competition.

* Do not perform simultaneous stressful procedures (do not wean and vaccinate at the same time, for example).

* Veterinary treatment should assure considerate handling of animals, with use of analgesics (pain relievers) when undertaking painful procedures. Traumatic procedures such as dehorning should be performed when animals are young and as small as possible. Restraint at this time is easier, and pain and trauma can be minimized.

* Treatment should attempt to minimize animal fear. Ensure that the stockperson attending animals is trained not only in technical skills, but in the importance of a good human-animal relationship. This has been documented to have a profound effect on animal wel-

fare and productivity. Handling animals in a consistently patient, positive manner (hitting, kicking, prodding, shouting, etc.) is important.

* Poor, stressful handling and restraint can cause great economic

losses to farmers. Eliminate loud noises and clanking metal in chutes and gates. Rope halters are preferred to use of nose tongs on cattle.

* Mixing of unfamiliar animals into established groups leads to aggression and production losses.

Keep new animals separate.

* Reduce exposure to infectious diseases and parasites whenever possible.

* Move animals in such a way as to avoid stressful encounters. Use electric prods sparingly. T.L. Smith



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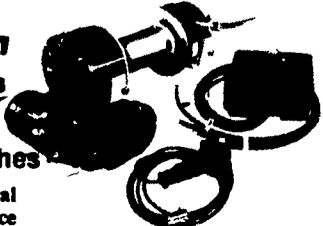
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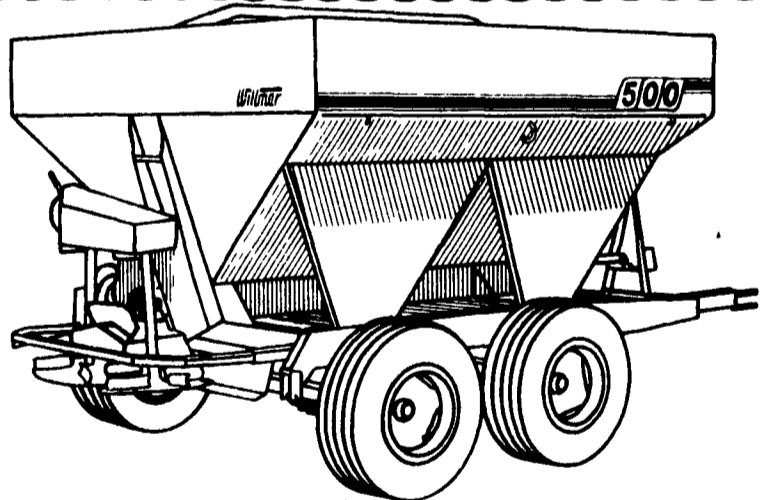
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