

## Cows Perform Better When Not Threatened

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NEWARK, Del. — It used to be that we would select against animal temperament in our dairy herds.

It is not enough that dairy farmers, feeders and milkers of dairy animals want to be gentle and understanding in daily handling. In addition, a certain behavior on the part of the animals is needed to ease management and avoid accidents to people and animals.

As a youngster growing up on a small dairy farm in the south German mountains, I worked with Milking simmentals.

I remember vividly how much trouble the first milking of a just-

fresh heifer often was. A new event to the heifer, it was painful because of her sensitive swollen udder; she also missed her newborn calf.

The result was a great deal of agitation and fear on her side and impatience on ours, which lead to hobbling and other restraints.

These tactics did nothing to reduce her fear, and may even have caused some kicking and injury to her or to us, or, at the very least, some spilled milk.

Understanding animal behavior in the wild or of domesticated animals, such as dogs, cats and horses, developed much sooner than inside the cow barn.

Cows were not considered intelligent or interesting for such studies.

They were held securely in stanchion barns for safe management of milking, feeding, treating, sleeping, even when they were left out to grazing pastures for part of the day or night.

In the early 1960s in the United States a revolution began on the dairy farm with a new management style of housing dairy cattle away from stanchions in so-called "loose housing" and "free stalls."

The stanchion safety restraint for handling cows disappeared, except for milking, when the cows had to march into a milking parlor. Otherwise, they were loose for feeding and sleeping.

It became obvious to farm managers and dairy scientists that they had better learn about cow beha-

avior, since the cows were now free to interact with other cows that had different personalities or temperaments and with different managers.

At that time no textbook existed on the behavior of dairy cows, goats or sheep, because there was no extensive study, nor were official classes on farm animal behavior offered to college students.

I started one of the first courses in this country on the behavior of domesticated animals. Now every United States agricultural college offers such a course.

It is crucial to good dairy management to understand how dairy animals behave.

It is not enough to select against an undesirable temperament of animals within a herd, even though we now know that beha-

avior traits are inherited. We now recognize that certain factors in the farm environment — including people — have a modifying influence on the behavior of farm animals.

New research from Denmark, published in the Journal of Dairy Science (82(1999): 720-727), reinforce the above discussion and brings new insight into understanding animal behavior by introducing the term "fearfulness."

Animals are fearful of anything new and unfamiliar; under less threatening conditions, however, they want to explore the new and become familiar with it.

If the experience is positive, it will reduce fearfulness toward the new, whether it's an object or a

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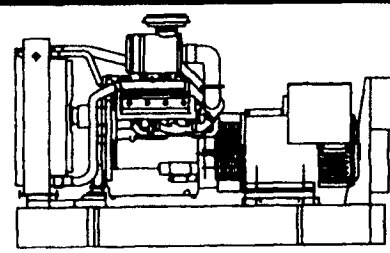
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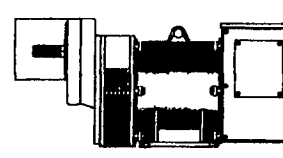
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