

Cows Perform Better When Not Threatened

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person. If an animal is less fearful toward a certain person, then it is more easily handled by that person; it also is even less likely to kick.

On the other hand, rough handling of cows causes fearfulness, stress and less productivity.

This points up some important questions:

Do dairy animals remember and distinguish between individuals?

Do they discriminate between those who treat them gently and those who are harsh, scare them by shouting or sudden movements, or beat them?

Do dairy cows learn fear of certain people, of certain color of their clothing (for example, veterinary lab coats), or of certain environments?

This can have serious implications on the dairy farm when the principal milking person wants a vacation. How do the cows react

to that relief person?

In this Danish study, 14 Holstein cows in mid-lactation were handled by two people, one was gentle and the other shouted and prodded (no rough mistreatment was applied).

The results showed clearly that cows distinguish between different people who have handled them before. Cow behavior during milking varied greatly according to the handler who was present.

However, color of clothing is one cue that cows used to discriminate between people, indicating the importance of the visual senses for discrimination by cows. When both handlers wore the same color clothing, the distinction between handlers disappeared, although a mix of visual, olfactory and auditory cues was used in people discrimination.

A significant variation also was found among different cows in their ability to distinguish between

handlers, which indicates individual differences in cows with regard to learning ability.

Cows that were best at discriminating between the two handlers were most affected by fearfulness and restlessness during milking, had a faster heart rate and resulted in significantly less milk production. The latter was due probably to inhibition of the oxytocin let-down effect, leading to reduced or delayed milk ejection.

The same results recently were found in studies with dairy goats and Brown Swiss cows.

We have known for some time that a barking dog nearby cows being milked disturbs them; their fear of the dog releases the stress hormone adrenaline, which then blocks the oxytocin effect on milk letdown in the udder.

Now we know that cows are much more sophisticated in their distinction between familiar and

unfamiliar people, their ways of handling, as well as other factors of the environment, which will result in significant differences in milk production.

These findings reinforce our strong belief that high productivity and profitability on the dairy farm goes hand in hand with concepts of animal welfare.

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If you are following the governance proposal that will be voted

on in Boise, check out the "NEWS" button on the Association's website. Not only does it have the most current issue of the Holstein News with the Call to Convention, it also has the past four issues that cover the governance proposal from the beginning.

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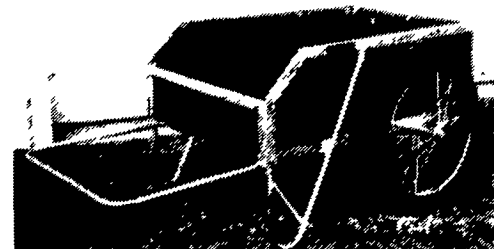


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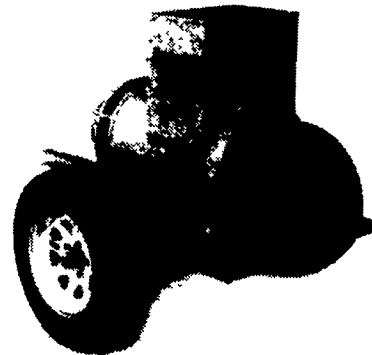
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