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Animal welfare training of farmers: Its role on the development of the dairy sector – the Brazilian experience

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The knowledge of animals' needs and how they interact with their environment is important to help livestock people to avoid negative situations, which result in stress for the animals and consequent economic losses. Considering this question we developed investigations to improve the dairy cattle welfare, focusing on human-animal interaction during handling. Dairy cows are often kept in intense contact with humans, especially during milking, and the quality of these interactions could affect the cow welfare and milk yield. The aims of our studies have been the understanding on how the welfare of dairy cattle could be affected by handling and the development of best practices for handling in dairy units. The first step is the assessment of handling conditions, describing situations in which stockpeople deliver pleasant and unpleasant actions during handling. One specific result with handling during milking showed that pleasant interactions increased the percentage of ruminating cows (from 10% to 30.2%) and decreased the number of cows presenting high reactivity (from 30.7% to 8.2%), and it was found that the presence of an unpleasant stockperson in the milking parlour dropped down the milk yield (1.6 kg of milk/cow/milking). The quality of handling also has an effect on calves survival and performance. Two different methods of handlings were compared: normal vs. improved (best practice of handling: which includes more interactions with stockpeople and allowed social interactions among the calves), the adoption of the best practices of handling resulted in the decrease of calf death (from 4.95 to 1.42 calves per month) and in the use of antibiotics treatments (from 35.2 to 16.3 treatments/month). These and others results were used to formulate strategies to improve handling procedures in dairy units, generating practical solutions that were validated under commercial farms.



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The first subject was: best practices of handling during milking, which was validated in 23 dairy farms in Brazil involving 42 stockpeople; the results were confirmed and the guide of “Best Practices of Handling: Milking” was wrote (available at www.grupoetco.org.br). The same strategy has been carried out with the “Best Practice of Handling: Dairy Calves”, and the guide will be available soon. The best practices of handling (development and adoption) have been an important tool for the improvement of welfare in dairy farms, reducing stress and economic losses.