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Dairy cows behaviors affect their body hygiene and welfare

Sant'Anna, A.C.¹; Paranhos da Costa¹, M.J.R.; Rosa, M.S.²; Silva, L.C.M.¹; Oliveira, C.R.¹

1 – FCAV - Unesp, Campus de Jaboticabal – SP, Brazil

2 – Instituto Federal Sul de Minas Gerais, Campus de Muzambinho – MG, Brazil

The aim of this study was to identify behaviors that lead to poor body hygiene in dairy cows and the effect of this condition on udder health. The study was carried out with 36 lactating dairy cows in twelve periods of eight hours of observation. Cows' hygiene was expressed as cleanliness score, somatic cell count was used as mastitis indicators. Some behaviors were directly associated with body hygiene, such as lie down in a mud surface; while others were indirectly related to dirt transfer, e.g. lie down in a shaded area. There was no direct connection between feeding behavior and body hygiene, but it was found an indirect effect since both were affected by the cows' social rank. The hygiene of the cows had effect on mastitis; very clean animals were less frequent presenting the disease. We concluded that cleaner cows have less chance to have their welfare affected, thus, behaviors that expose cows to poor hygiene have an implication on their welfare.