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THE NEED OF WELFARE TRAINING FOR BRAZILIAN DAIRY STOCKPEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Dairy cows stay in close contact with humans during milking, by this it is expected that the human-cow interactions play important role in defining the welfare of both, and also have important effect on milk yield (Breuer et al., 2000). Previous data had showed that the welfare of dairy cows is influenced by dairy person actions during milking (Rosa and Paranhos da Costa, 2007). Positive actions in this occasion are able to increase the percentage of ruminating cows (from 10 to 30.2%) and decrease their reactivity (from 30.7 to 8.2% cows presenting high reactivity); these behaviours can be used as cow indicators of comfort. Despite of the importance of positive actions and prejudice of negative actions, in the studies of Rosa (2004), 78,3% of farms visited showed unadvisable or instable interactions where predominated inadequate dairy people behaviours (hitting, shouting, pushing the cow and tale twisting). It was identified a critical point for investigation, focused in understand the origin of this behaviours and add more information about human-cow interaction, that could help in the construction of a training material for dairy people. So the aim of this study was to assess the notion of dairy people in relation to their interaction with dairy cows.

METODOLOGY

Fifty five dairy people were interviewed at 37 dairy farms from São Paulo State, Brazil. The quality of interaction was defined by the use of positive handling procedures (positive tactile contact, brushing and being present and talking when feeding the animals) and negative practices (shouting, high level of noise during milking, hitting, chasing the cows with any object). The interview was composed of 15 questions about the person (age, sex, previous training) the herd (breed, kind of milking, number of lactating cows) and the expectative about the use of the positive and negative practices described above. The responses were categorized into four alternatives that reflected the different opinions in ascending order of knowledge and analyzed according to the relative frequency of people per response category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the interviewed people (90.9%) affirmed to know that negative handling practices decrease milk production. However, when interviewed about the use of these negative practices, they recognized that often use some negative handling procedures when milking the cows. For example, among those who reported hitting the cows (66.4%), approximately half (30.9%) affirmed to know the negative consequences to animals, but they declared to do it because the belief that this practice facilitates their work, they believe that hitting they could have more control over the animals. On the other hand, there were cases that declared to use negative practices as consequence of a lack of knowledge about the negative consequences of it. For example, when opined about talking loud (noisy) during milking, most of them (78.2%) believed that this behavior is not negative to animals, showing ignorance about the dairy cows' behavior. The actions shouting and chasing the cows with any object were considered by 40% and 34.5%, respectively, as positive actions, and they declared that these practices increased speed of animals during your drive and have no prejudice for cows. Thus, a expectative of facilitate the handling and the lack of knowledge about the cows' behavior (or a combination of both) were the main reasons found to explain the use of negative practices, even when they showed the concept of consequences. The interview also showed that less than half of handlers had attended some kind of training related to dairy cattle handling, and only two of them (3.7%) had attended a course on animal welfare. Based on these results and in other studies (Rosa, 2004; Rosa e Paranhos da Costa, 2007) about human-animal interaction in Brazilian farms we felt a necessity of develop initiatives towards the improvement of knowledge for this category of worker. Using the data from research and also on the experiences acquired during the interactions with the dairy farmers and their workers we realized that the improvement of human-animal interaction goes beyond a theoretical/conceptual training. It is need a cognitive behavioral training, to provide the basis for the best practices (approaching the biology of cattle) and explain the importance of their behavior, showing how important the workers are to achieve good animal welfare and the success of the dairy activity as a hole. For this, was followed a model of training program based on the development of guides of good practices of handling. The guide of Good Practices of Handling: Milking (Rosa et al., 2009), which is already available (in Portuguese) at www.grupoetco.org.br, brings recommendations about the milking procedure (technical information, hygiene), how to drive the cows in a no aggressive way and also orient dairy people in how to interact positively with the cows.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that it is necessary to improve the knowledge of stockpeople about their interaction with cows. For this is required a specific type of training that approaches the importance to carry through pleasant actions to the animals. The proposal to achieve this is working with guides of Good Practices of Handling during milking.

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