

REFERÊNCIA:

Sant'Anna, A. C.; Paranhos da Costa, M. J. R.; Rosa, M. S.; Magalhães Silva, L. C.; Oliveira, C. R. Body Cleanliness in Dairy Cows: Behaviour and Individual Differences. In: Biennial Meeting of the International Society for Comparative Psychology, 14. Argentina: ISCP, 09-11, out. 2008. **Anais...** p.80.

Body Cleanliness in Dairy Cows: Behaviour and Individual Differences

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The body hygiene condition of dairy cows is an important indicator of their welfare and housing conditions. The aim of this study was to analyse the effects of cows' behaviour on their body cleanliness. The study was carried out in twelve periods of eight hours of observation, six during summer and six during winter. At least 36 lactating dairy cows were observed every period, recording their posture (standing or lying down) and the cleanliness condition of the place where they were (clean, dirty, and very dirty). Cows were confined on a concrete surface. Body cleanliness was defined by using four categories: very clean, clean, dirty and very dirty. In three observational periods the housing conditions were uniform, with most of the area dirty. Under these conditions there was no effect of the cows' behaviour on their body cleanliness category. When the housing condition was not uniform (six periods), there was an effect of cows' behaviour on their body cleanliness. Individual differences in body hygiene were found in all periods, and they were consistent throughout the periods. We concluded that the variation in the body cleanliness could be explained only partially by the housing conditions and cows' behaviour.