

Symposium A1

Importance of motherhood: The strength of dairy cows' motivation to access their calf in different cow-calf contact systems

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Cow and calf are separated at birth in most dairy production systems. Benefits for calves with prolonged cow-contact have been investigated, but little is known from the cows' perspective. Maternal behaviour is assumed to have a high motivational strength and to represent a behavioural need. We measured the motivational strength of dairy cows to gain access to their calves after 5.9 ± 0.9 weeks of housing in one of three calf-contact systems: control (0h contact/d), full- (23h contact/d), and part-time contact (10h contact/d). Cows ($n=81$) were first trained to walk through pressure-weighted gates; those that passed the learning criterion continued to testing ($n=60$, distributed as 11 controls, 25 full-time, and 24 part-time cows), where the weight of the gate increased by 1 bar of pressure after each successful passage to access their calf. Cows were tested once daily, until reaching the maximum price paid, defined as failure to pass over two consecutive days. Full- and part-time cows did not differ in maximum price paid, and they paid significantly more than control cows (median (IQR): 4 (3-6), 4.5 (4-7), and 1 bar (0-2), respectively; log-rank test, $\chi^2=29.4$, p



SYMPOSIA ABSTRACTS

(sorted by session)