

THE COLOSTRUM COUNSEL



Ready for a Challenge? Discover How You and Your Calves Can Thrive!

Introduction

Personality traits influence dairy calves' responses to disease, pain, and nutritional challenges. By understanding these traits and implementing effective management strategies, farmers can enhance calf welfare and reduce stress for both the animals, labor and farm owners.

Understanding Calf Personality Traits

Recent research has shown that dairy calves exhibit distinct personality traits that affect their responses to various stressors. These traits include:

- **Fearful:** Calves that are more cautious and slower to approach new stimuli.
- **Active:** Calves that are more energetic and exhibit higher levels of movement.
- **Explorative:** Calves that are curious and interact more with their environment.

Recognizing these traits can help farmers tailor their management practices to better support individual calves.

Impact of Personality on Stress Responses

Calves routinely face stressors such as disease (e.g., diarrhea), painful procedures (e.g., dehorning), and nutritional challenges (e.g., weaning). The study found that personality traits significantly influence how calves respond to these stressors:

- **Diarrhea:** Fearful calves showed greater changes in milk intake and drinking speed, while active calves exhibited changes in activity levels.
- **Dehorning:** Explorative calves had less disruption in feeding behaviors and lying bouts, indicating better resilience to pain.
- **Weaning:** Active calves had fewer unrewarded visits to the feeder, suggesting better adaptation to the transition from milk to solid feed.

Understanding these responses can help farmers identify calves that may need additional support during stressful periods.

Practical Implications for Farmers

By incorporating knowledge of calf personality traits into management practices, farmers can improve calf welfare and reduce stress. Here are some practical tips:

1. **Tailored Feeding Plans:** Adjust feeding strategies based on individual calf behaviors. For example, provide additional support to fearful calves during weaning to ensure adequate solid feed intake.
2. **Pain Management:** Implement comprehensive pain management protocols during procedures like dehorning. Explorative calves may benefit from additional monitoring to ensure they remain comfortable.
3. **Disease Monitoring:** Use precision livestock technologies to track changes in behavior and identify early signs of disease. Active calves may require closer observation during periods of illness.
4. **Environmental Enrichment:** Provide opportunities for calves to explore and interact with their environment. This can help reduce stress and promote positive behaviors.

Benefits of Improved Calf Management

Effective calf management not only enhances animal welfare but also offers several benefits to farmers:

- **Reduced Stress:** By addressing the specific needs of individual calves, farmers can minimize stress for both the animals and themselves.
- **Improved Productivity:** Healthy, well-managed calves are more likely to grow into productive adults, contributing to the overall success of the farm.
- **Enhanced Welfare:** Promoting positive behaviors and reducing stressors leads to better overall welfare for the calves.

This summary is based on findings from the original study. You can read the full research here.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022030224010130>

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