

Animal Welfare



Socio-Economic Resilience



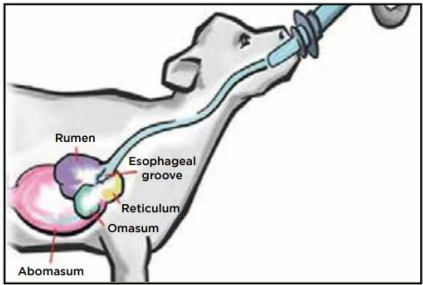
Background

Traditionally many calves are fed milk in buckets. Offering milk to calves via teat, teat bucket or milk bars (instead of buckets or troughs) provides an out-let for the sucking motivation and can therefore prevent the development of cross-sucking.

How does the strategy work?

When a calf is born, the abomasum or fourth stomach is the only stomach that is functioning. Teat feeding triggers a reflex which causes a groove in the rumen (oesophageal groove) to close. This directs milk past the rumen and into the abomasum where it is digested. In addition, using a teat may also stimulate saliva production and maintain fluid intake in scouring calves.

If a calf drinks from a bucket the oesophageal groove may not be activated, and the milk may go into the rumen. As the rumen is not functioning, the milk is not digested and ferments, causing the calf to scour.



Calves' motivation to suck is elicited by the taste of milk. When the milk is given in a teat, calves spend more time ingesting the milk and suck the teat after the milk is drunk. This ensures the satisfaction of their behavioral need to suck and reduce the occurrence of abnormal cross-sucking (sucking other calves body or head). Teats must be left with the calves until they have finished sucking.

Positive features

- Teat-buckets and “milk-bars” enables the calf to satisfy its behavioural need to suck in relation to milk intake.
- Feeding the milk via a teat prevents the development of abnormal cross-sucking behaviour.

Be careful, especially on these points

- Feeding via a teat does not prevent competition for milk.
- Younger calves typically drinks slower that older and may need protection if group housed.
- To reduce competition, group calves of similar age

Specific advises

- Competition for milk is reduced by
- feeding high milk allowances,
 - keeping group size small (<7 calves/group)
 - separating the heads and bodies of calves while drinking milk

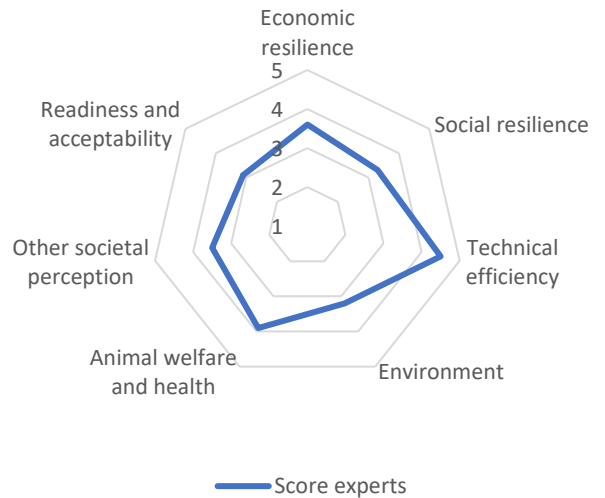
Equipment involved? Investment?

A variety of options are available these can include teat-buckets and “milk-bars” with teats, which are relatively inexpensive, and computed-controlled automated calf feeding systems which can cost thousands of Euros.

In group housing competition for milk is reduced by placing barriers between the calves. Barriers separating the calves' heads and front part of their body offers better protection than barrier that only separates the heads.



Assessment of method



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Quote of the farmer:

“Use of multi-teat milk bars has reduced the time required to feed my calves”

