Animal Welfare Program

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Feeding Behaviour Identifies Dairy Cows at Risk for Metritis

Background:

- Metritis is a common disease after calving in dairy cattle
- Reduced feed intake by cattle in the days before calving is well documented
- It is unclear whether changes in feeding behaviour can be used in the early detection of metritis

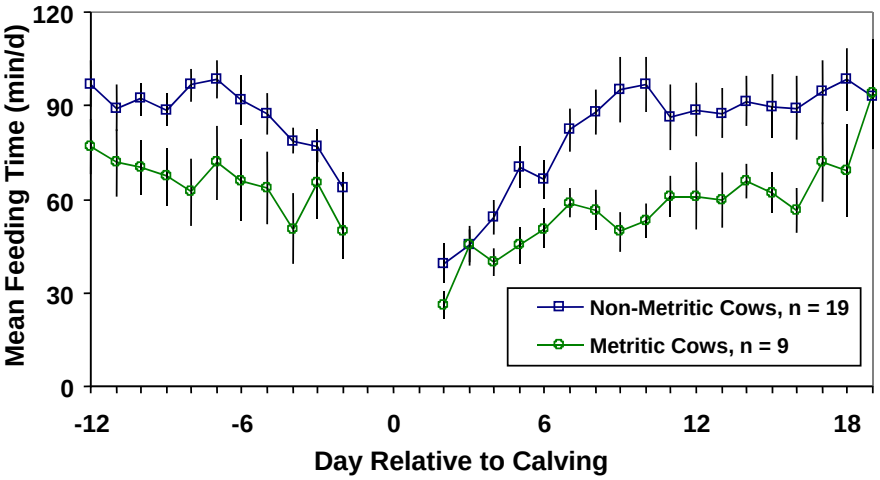
Objective: *To determine if feeding behaviour can be used to predict metritis in dairy cows*

Methodology:

- Feeding behaviour was monitored from 12 days before until 19 days after calving, excluding the 3 days around calving
- Holstein heifers (n=6) and cows (n=20, parity=1.6±0.7) were fitted with passive transponders to provide automatic monitoring of cow presence at the feed alley*
- Metritis was diagnosed by rectal body temperature (measured daily) and examination of vaginal discharge (measured every 3 to 5 days)

Results:

Figure 1. *Daily feeding activity of cows in transition (mean±SE)*



- 69% of animals demonstrated some symptoms of metritis
- Metritic animals spent 24 minutes/day less time feeding than non-metritic animals (Fig. 1; P<0.01)
- Odds of being diagnosed with metritis increased by 2.56 times with every 10-minute decrease in feeding time

Conclusion: *Feeding behaviour both before and after calving identifies dairy cows at risk for metritis*

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