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July 2016 Newsletter - Cattle Stockmanship *Prepared by Dr. Tom Linden*

First and foremost, I'd like to take a second to thank all the veterinarians and staff at Northwest Vets, and especially the clients that I've met, for giving me such a warm welcome to the area. It has made an easy transition even smoother and I'm greatly looking forward to continuing to meet and work with you all.

It is fitting that my first attempt at drafting a newsletter should occur on July 8th, better known as "Cow Appreciation Day". I am reminded of a quote by American author William Lyon Phelps who once said "If happiness truly consisted in physical ease and freedom from care, then the happiest individual would not be either a man or a woman; it would be, I think, an American cow." Phelps lived in a time when it was quite common for a cow to live out most of her life on pasture, but I believe this statement to be as true now more than ever. That said, when was the last time we've stepped back and really looked hard at our day to day interactions with our animals? Do we create an environment that truly allows for physical ease and freedom from care? I personally have to continually try to assess and improve my handling of patients both individually and in groups, and thought it would be a fitting topic for this day of appreciation.

In thinking about the interactions between us, and the intention to create a positive experience for both, we first have to remember some of a cow's unique anatomical features, instincts and behaviors that result from being a herding/prey species. These include having an excellent peripheral vision (but limited site directly in front and in back), poor depth perception (ex. she can't tell how far it is when she steps off a curb), more sensitive hearing, flight zones, and pressure zones (which is the area further out from the flight zone). Once moving in an intended direction, cows like to continue moving, rather than a stop-and-go pattern (I can empathize when driving). They also have a return instinct, desiring to go back to the place from which they came. If we learn to use these traits to our advantage, the less stressful the interactions between us become.

The obvious benefit to low-stress handling of cows is how we as an industry are seen in the eyes of the public, who are ever more concerned and attentive to how dairy products are made. That said, good stockmanship should not be something we should feel forced into practicing; rather, we should realize there is an opportunity for positive impacts on health, productivity, and most importantly our own safety. For example, cattle that are stressed by loud noises (i.e. shouting, clapping) on the way to the milking parlor have increased levels of stress hormones (cortisol, adrenaline). These hormones inhibit milk letdown, resulting in delayed milk out and increased machine on-time. This leads to more short term and long term teat end



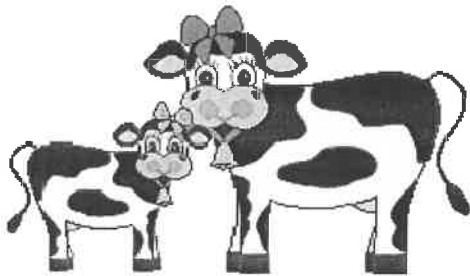
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changes, increasing the incidence of mastitis, higher somatic cell counts, and lower milk premiums. Dairies that have performed stockmanship training have demonstrated increased dry matter intakes, and less work-related injuries/claims resulting from stressed cows. Good stockmanship shouldn't begin with our animals once they are adults either, but preferably as early on as possible. A 2015 study published in the Journal of Applied Animal Behaviour Science showed positive associations in average daily weight gains and decreased avoidance distances for heifers that were "treated" with positive human interactions (Lürzel et al). Increased average daily gain in heifers has repeatedly been shown to lead to increased milk production in later life.

With all its potential rewards, and especially considering the low financial input necessary to reap these rewards, take time to consider re-examining your operation's stockmanship practices. Work with your herd veterinarian on identifying areas of opportunity and training personnel, especially those new to working with cows. A good resource to ask about is Dairy Care 365, which has training modules such as "Introduction to Dairy Stockmanship" and "Moving Cows to the Milking Parlor" in both English and Spanish.



HOPE YOU ARE ENJOYING YOUR SUMMER!