

Risk Factors on Welfare of Dairy Cows and Calves in Galle and Matara Districts of Sri Lanka

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At present welfare friendly animal products have an increasing demand similar to organic products. Objective of the study was to identify management related risk factors that affect welfare of dairy cows and calves reared in Galle and Matara Districts. A pre tested questionnaire was used in the survey. Tie –up small scale intensive dairy farms (n=67) having average cow number 2 were selected around milk collecting centres and evaluated. General information, fate of male calves, calving management, colostrum feeding, calf- dam separation, painful procedures, feeding, housing, cow-cleanliness, shed conditions and health management were focused in the questionnaire. Data were analysed by using IBM SPSS Statistic 22. Jersey crosses were the prominent (85%) cattle breed. Adults (31-65 yrs.) were mainly involved (92.5%) in dairying. Most of the cows had dirty hind limbs and udders (80%). Cleanliness of udder and flank were significantly affected ($P < 0.05$) by the whole shed length. The reason may be there was a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between given width and length of sheds from the standards (1.7m width x 2.45m length). Slippery floors were observed in 46.66% farms that causes injuries to cows. Body condition score of cows revealed 2.5 (10.4%), 2.5-3 (86.5%) and > 3.5 (2.9%) indicating majority a negative energy balance. Male calves (96.66%) were kept in the farm for draft purpose (to pull carts) and few farms (3.33%) sold calves early in life. Calving pens were not found and calves were kept in contact with mother cows. Majority of farms (53.33%) started colostrum feeding within 1-2hrs. of birth. Most of the farms (68%) practiced weaning at 3 months of age. No any farmers practiced painful practices such as dehorning, branding, castration, etc. Feeding and drinking practices were satisfactory. However, feeder height was found as a risk factor for 53.33% of calves. Water was given by damaged buckets (96.66%) restricting *adlibitum* water intake. It is concluded that housing related aspects and feed/water related aspects were found as the major risk factors for the welfare of cows and calves respectively.

Key words: *Calves, dairy cows, management, risk factors, wellbeing*

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