

Regrouping Disrupts Cow Behaviour and Lowers Production

Regrouping is a common management practice in free-stall herds. A recent study at the University of British Columbia examined the effects of this practice on feeding behaviour, social behaviour and milk production.

Eleven mid-lactation Holstein cows were individually introduced into previously established social groups. Behaviour and milk production were monitored from 3 days before until 3 days after regrouping. Cows were fed a total mixed ration twice daily. Time-lapse video was used to monitor feeding and social behaviour.

After regrouping, cows spent approximately 15 minutes less time eating in the first hour following morning fresh feed delivery compared with the 3

previous days. Cows were displaced from the feeding area on average 10 times/day before regrouping, but this value increased to more than 25 times on the day of mixing and gradually declined in the following days. The number of lying bouts declined from an average of 12.2 to 10.5 on the day of regrouping; lying time showed a similar tendency.

Cows groomed themselves, on average, 7.5 times/day over the 3 days before regrouping but this declined to 1.3 times on the day of mixing and remained lower for the following 3 days. Average milk production declined from 43.4 kg/day to 39.7 kg/day on the day of regrouping, but rebounded on subsequent days.

This study clearly demonstrated that cow behaviour and production can be negatively affected in the hours and days after regrouping.

source: M.A.G. von Keyserlingk et al., J Dairy Sci 91:1011(2008)