Cow handling and its importance in preventing lameness

Shahab Ranjbar.N.I

Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney, NSW, Australia (shahab.ranjbar@sydney.edu.au)

Abstract:

The dairy industry has seen an increase in the number of cows per farm around the world. This translates into more frequent human-animal interactions on farms. Sadly, farm animals have sometimes been subjected to aversive handling which can lead to being fearful of people, increased handling problems (such as injuries to both animal and humans) and reduced animal welfare. Poor handling techniques have also been shown to affect the productivity of commercial farm animals. However, it has been shown that the environment and facilities where the interactions occur can also affect the outcome of the interaction. Hence, Facilities and handling techniques can both affect lameness in a herd. Available space per cow in the holding yard, use of backing gate, rotary platform exit and the concrete surface of the holding yard are some examples.

Some handling techniques can exert unnecessary pressure on cows' feet making them prone to developing lameness causing lesions. Considering the amount of interactions between cows and farm staff on farms, there is little we know about this topic in the dairy industry. The importance of staff training in low-stress cattle handling is often underestimated by farmers and farm health advisors. By improving our knowledge of safe and effective animal handling techniques and improving our facilities we have the potential to decrease lameness and increase animal productivity.

Key words: Cattle handling, Lameness, Welfare