

Feeding Behaviour Identifies Dairy Cows at Risk for Metritis

Background:

- Metritis is a common disease that can reduce milk yield and compromise reproductive performance.
- Reduced feed intake prior to calving is well documented.
- It is unclear whether feed intake before calving contributes to metritis susceptibility.

Objective: To determine if feeding behaviour can be used to predict metritis in the post-parturient dairy cow.



Methodology:

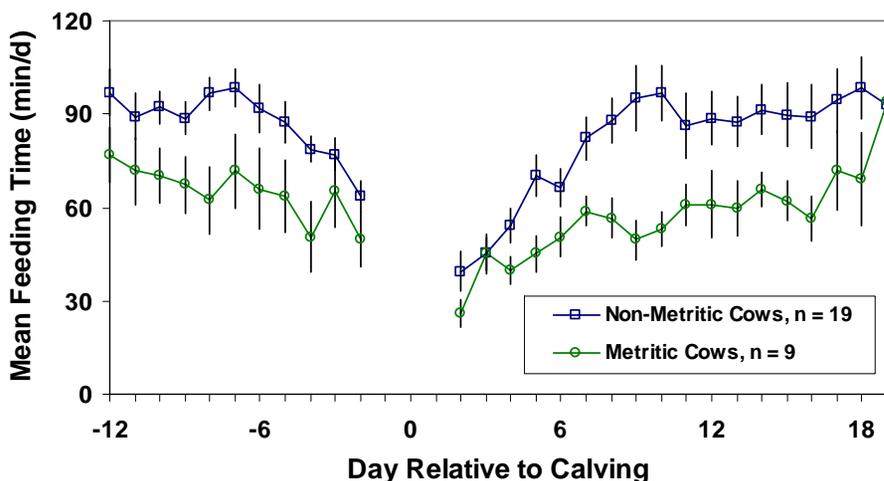
Feeding behaviour was monitored beginning 12 days before and ending 19 days after calving, excluding the 3 days around calving.

6 Holstein heifers and 20 cows (parity=1.6±0.7) were fitted with a passive transponder to provide computerized automatic monitoring of cow presence at the feed alley**. The system has been validated by T.J. Devries *et al* (2003) and provides a sensitive measure of time spent feeding by each animal.

Metritis was diagnosed by rectal body temperature (measured daily) & 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 ($P < 0.01$) during the entire transition period than did non-metritic animals (Figure 1).
- 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.