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Drinking and Competitive Behaviour of Dairy Calves Following Introduction into a Group Pen

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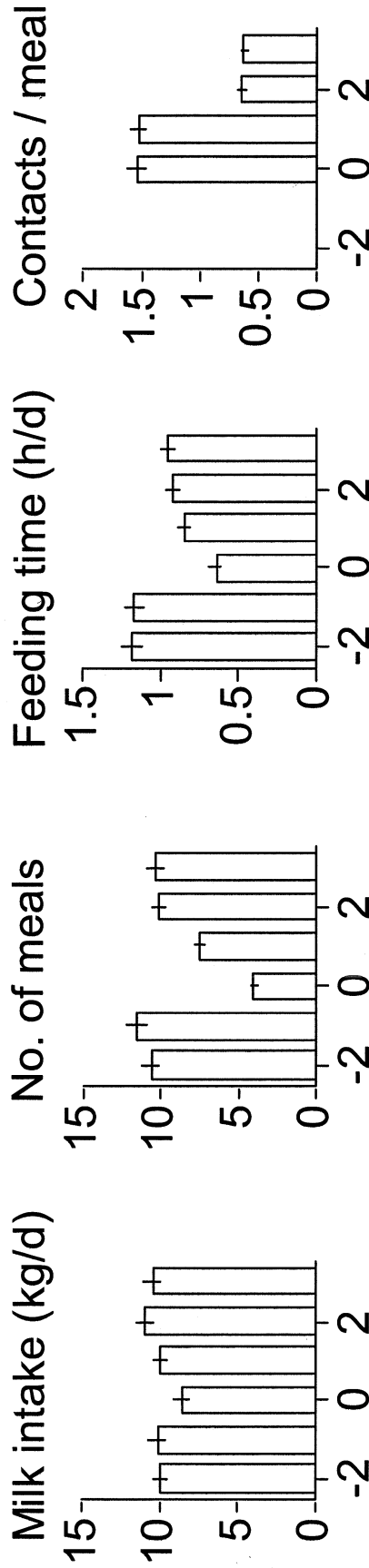
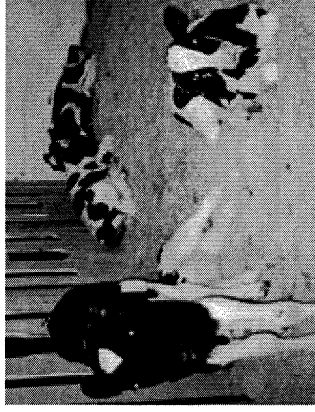
INTRODUCTION:

Group housing of calves provides increased access to space, allows for social interactions between calves and can also substantially reduce labour costs associated with cleaning and feeding of individually housed calves. One convenient way of teat feeding grouped calves is using a computer-controlled milk feeder. However, no work to date has examined the effects on feeding and competitive behaviour when calves are introduced into a new group.

METHODOLOGY:

In this study the feeding and competitive behaviour of 8 Holstein dairy calves was monitored before and after introduction into a pre-established group of older calves. Milk was fed ad libitum by a computer-controlled milk feeder. Milk feeding and competitive behaviours were monitored 2 d prior to introduction into the new group and for 4 d following mixing.

RESULTS:



On the day of mixing, calves drink less, consume fewer meals and spend less time feeding, but recover in the days following.

IMPLICATIONS:

For small groups of calves fed from a computerized feeder, mixing young calves has only transitory effects on feeding behaviour.

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