

DAIRY CALF PREFERENCES FOR DRY BEDDING



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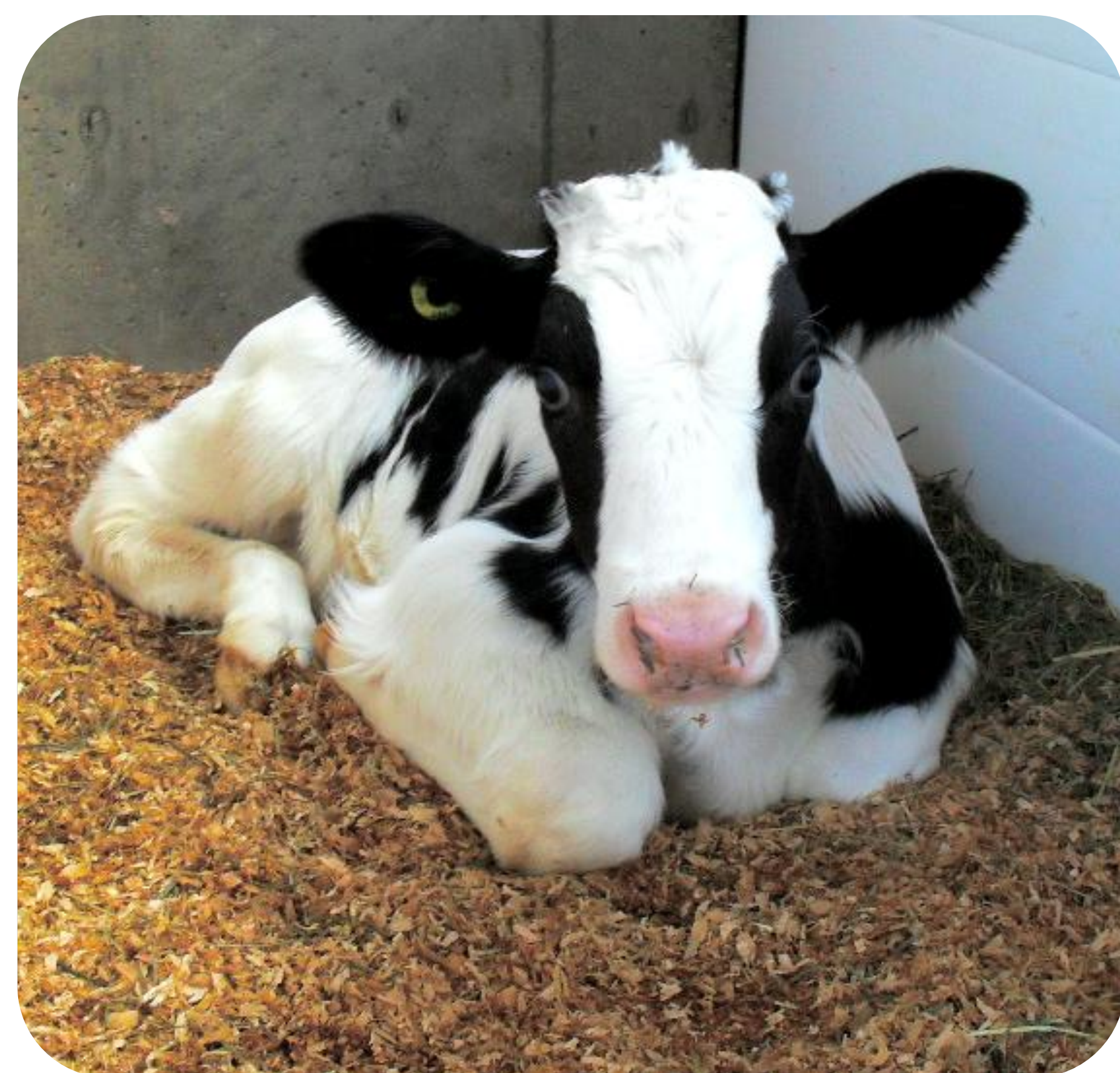
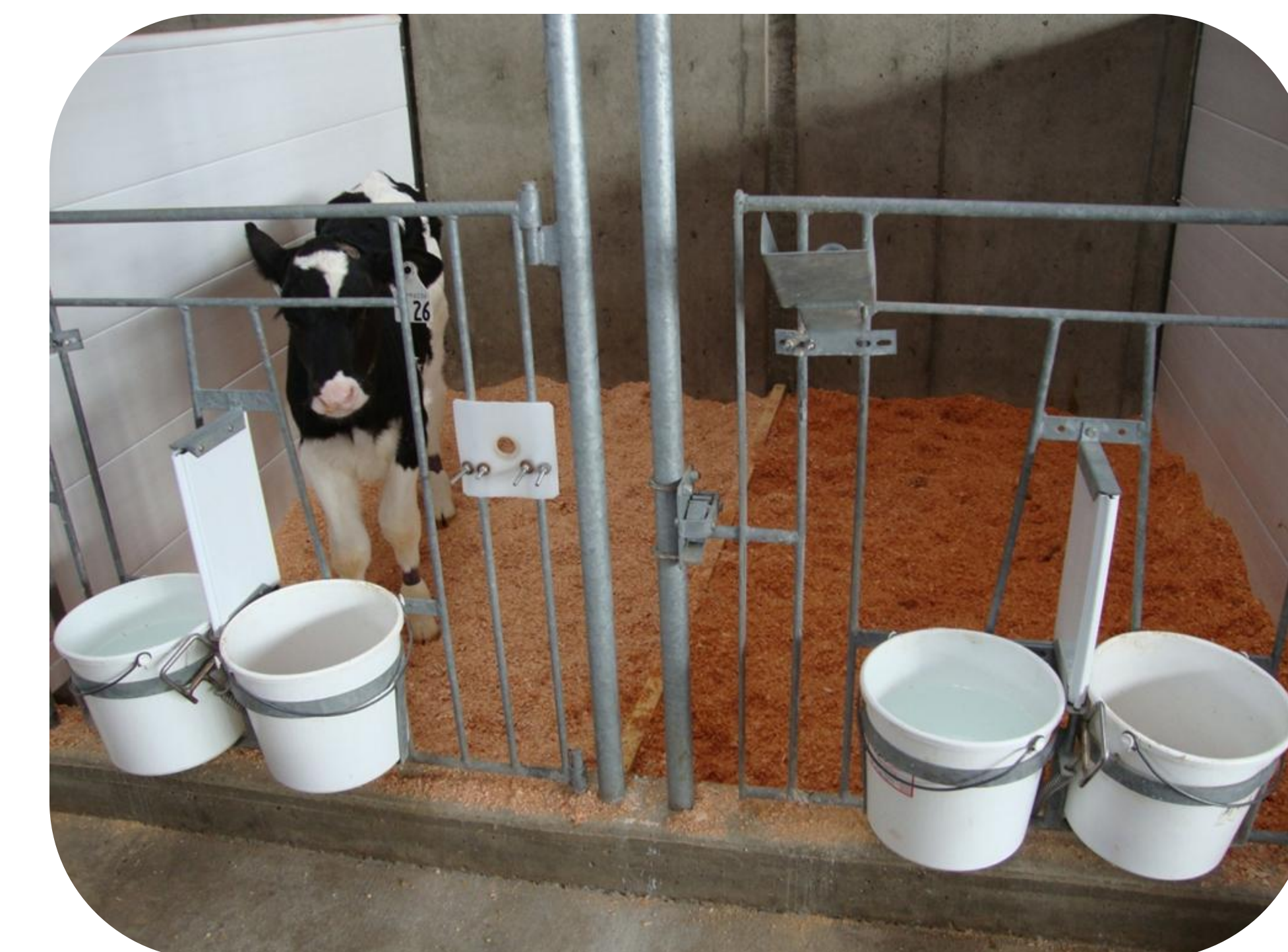
Poor bedding management, including low quantities or wet bedding, reduces lying time in adult cattle. No research to date has assessed the effects of bedding management on lying behavior of dairy calves.

Aims: To determine how different levels of moisture in sawdust bedding affect the lying behavior in dairy calves.

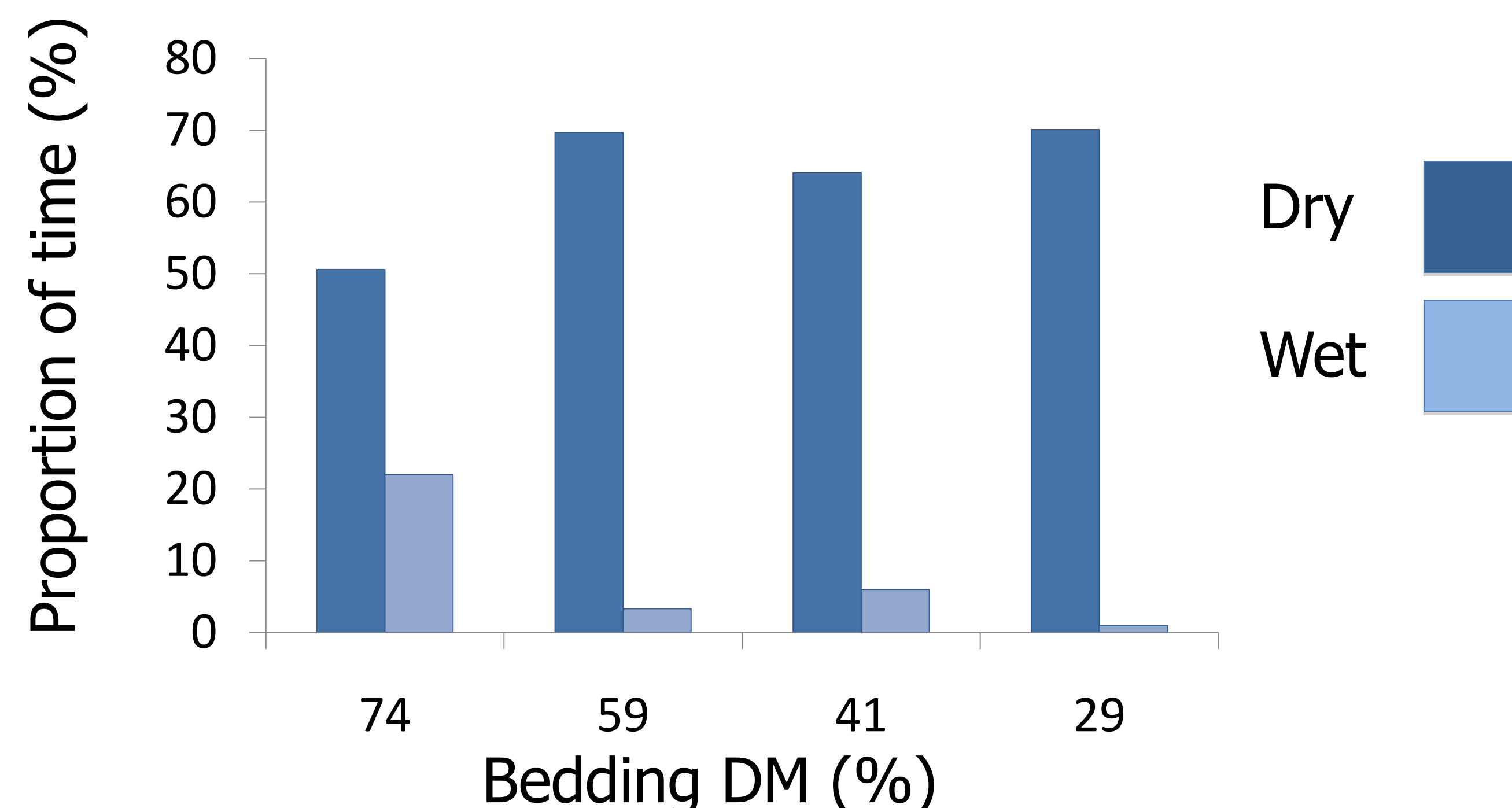
Methods:

Calves (5 Holstein heifers averaging 13.4 ± 1.8 days old and 51.2 ± 4.3 kg BW) were housed in double pens (2.5 x 2.0 m/pen). One half of each double pen was bedded with 7.5 kg of kiln-dried sawdust (90% dry matter (DM)); the other half had wet bedding (ranging from 75 to 30 % DM). Each day animals were tested with a different treatment level, with treatments assigned to the 5 calves in a 5 x 5 Latin-square.

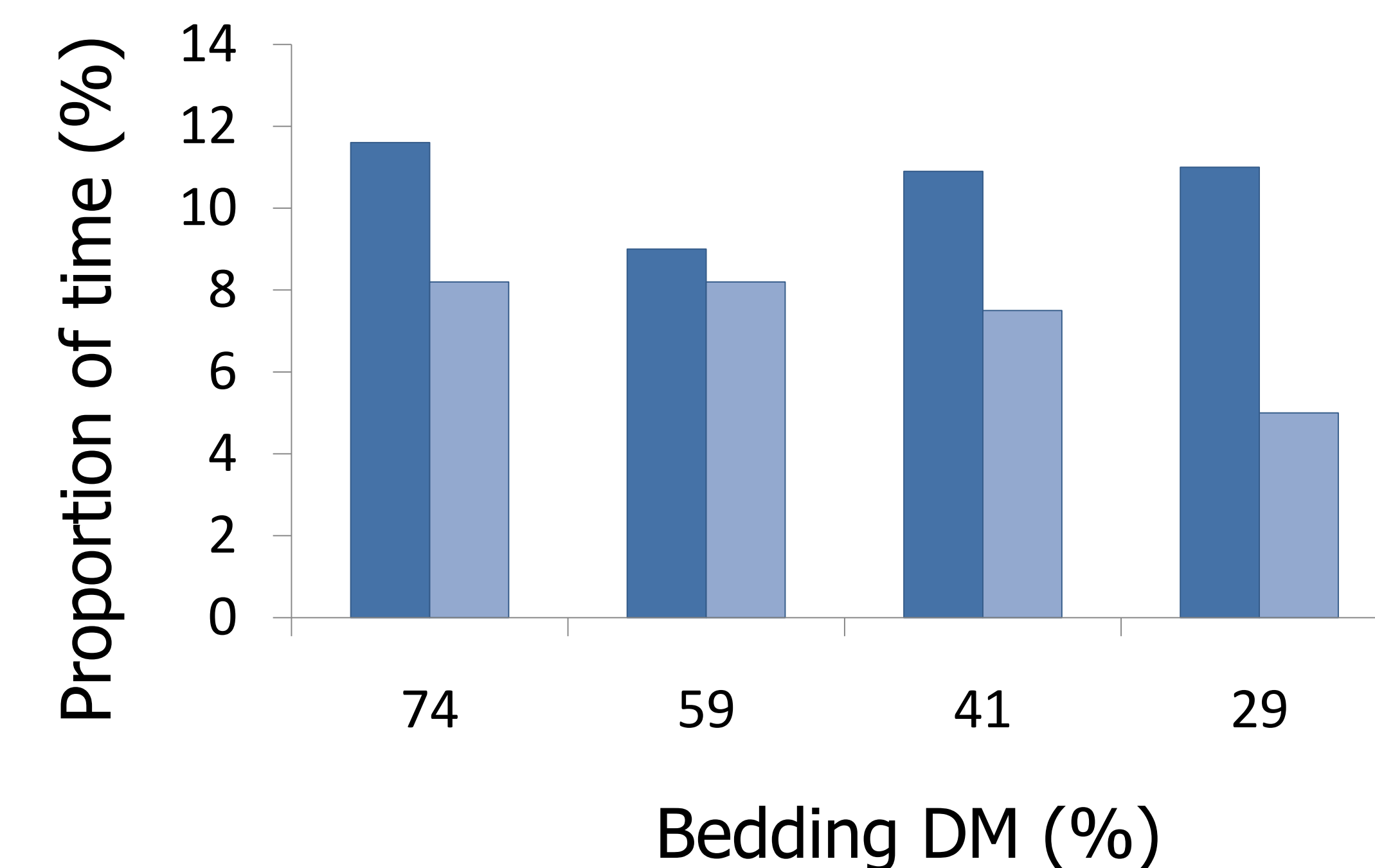
Time-lapse video was used to record calf posture when lying down, time spent lying down and standing and the side of the pen calves were occupying (wet or dry).



A) Preference: Proportion of Time Lying



B) Preference: Time Spent Standing Up



Results: Calves showed a strong preference to lie down on the dry bedding (Panel A above). When tested with the wettest alternative calves spent almost no time lying on the wet side of the pen. Lying on the wet side increased with the DM of the wet bedding, but calves avoided the wet side even at 70% DM. Calves showed a somewhat weaker preference for standing on the dry side; again the strongest preferences were observed when using the wettest treatment (29% DM; Panel B above).

Calves prefer dry bedding for standing and lying. Calves are able to discriminate even small differences in bedding DM.