BEHAVIOR OF GIR DAIRY COWS SUBMITTED TO TACTICAL STIMULATION

COMPORTAMENTO DE VACAS GIR LEITEIRO SUBMETIDAS A UM TREINAMENTO COM ESTIMULAÇÃO TÁTIL

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Bos indicus is known to be more reactive than *Bos taurus*, and high reactivity cows are not preferred for dairy farming due to the high accident rate, as well as lower milk yields and poor quality, high maintenance costs and stress. This study evaluated the behavioral evolution of dairy cows submitted to training with tactile stimulation. The experiment was conducted at the Getúlio Vargas experimental field of Empresa de Pesquisa Agropecuária de Minas Gerais, located in Uberaba (Minas Gerais). Twenty-seven cows (7 nulliparous cows and 20 cows having calved 1 to 4 times) were used. All animals received brushing throughout the body, in a standing stock, twice a day for 5 minutes per animal, for 14 consecutive days. The animals were evaluated daily to assign reactivity scores, composed of behavioral parameters of movement, displacement, speed of entrance and exit from the stock and behavior at entrance and exit from the stock. The information was analyzed using descriptive statistics using the FREQ and MEANS procedures (SAS Institute, INC., Cary, NC) on days 1, 7 and 14. Throughout the training, a positive evolution was observed in all parameters evaluated, that is, the animals became less averse to the handling and less reactive with brushing management, besides showing greater acceptance of the near presence and physical contact with humans. There was also a perception that the animals were attracted to the brushing, as they began to enter the stock without much help. The animals initially stopped out of fear, hesitating at the entrance to stock, but the training was efficient to reduce this behavior, probably due the calmer handling and the tactile stimulation. The reduction of the escape distance and the fear of human handers was perceptible through the evaluation of the parameters of speed of entrance and exit, since almost 100% of the animals started to walk more than run or trot, indicating that these characteristics were more sensitive in detecting real changes in animal behavior and in their well-being in relation to some object, installation or human. However, there were still animals that remained reactive to the tactile stimulation, especially the primiparous and multiparous cows, which can be explained by the fact that they carry in memory some trauma experienced by a negative interaction with humans or in the installation itself, since it is used for vaccination, weighing, insemination, loading and unloading. In heifers, on the other hand, probably because they were experiencing a more constant human-animal relationship recently, were more accustomed and calmer. The training is effective and the brushing is a good alternative to tame and desensitize the animals to human physical contact, resulting in better behavior in the milking room and higher dairy production.

Keywords: Gir dairy cows, heifers, tactile stimulation.