

Effects of mixing on drinking and competitive behaviour of dairy calves.

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It was already reported that group housing provides increased access to space and social interactions for calves while reducing labour costs for producers. However group housing requires that calves be mixed and no research has been done on the effects of mixing on behaviour of milk-fed dairy calves. This study aims to monitor the feeding and competitive behaviour of individual dairy calves after introduction into an established group of older calves fed ad libitum by a computer-controlled milk feeder. Milk consumption dropped slightly on mixing day, but increased on the following days 1 to 3; calves also visited the feeder less frequently on mixing day. The duration of feeder visits and milk consumption per visit increased before mixing and on mixing day. It was concluded that the feeding behaviour of young calves is affected on mixing day, but calves are able to maintain milk intake when using a milk feeder fitted with a stall that prevents calves from displacing one another.