



MEDIA RELEASE

Pain relief should be provided when disbudding and dehorning calves, study group concludes

Results point to a need for increased awareness of the relevant science, regulations and pain management protocols

A recent scientific study published in UFAW's scientific journal - *Animal Welfare* explores different stakeholder views on the use of pain relief for disbudding and dehorning dairy calves and has highlighted that 90% of the respondents thought pain relief should be provided.

The team at the University of British Columbia Animal Welfare Program, who carried out the study, hope that the results will promote awareness amongst veterinarians and producers of the relevant science, regulations and pain management protocols, as well as address misconceptions surrounding pain management.

The study took place over 18 months and is the first to include non-industry stakeholders in an interactive manner. Of the 354 participants comprised of farm workers, dairy producers, veterinarians, students, animal advocates and those with no involvement with the dairy industry, support for providing pain relief when disbudding and dehorning was consistent across all the groups.

Disbudding and dehorning are common management practices on dairy farms – performed to reduce the likelihood of injury to cattle and farm workers. Disbudding destroys the horn-producing cells and is usually done using a hot iron or caustic paste. Dehorning entails the cutting away of the horn and is usually done surgically, using a mechanical gouger, wire or saw. Previous studies have shown that, regardless of which procedure is used and when it is carried out, all forms of disbudding and dehorning are probably painful.

Dr Marina von Keyserlingk from the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia is one of the co-authors of the study. She said: “Despite evidence that these procedures are painful, and the availability of effective means of pain relief, use of pain mitigation remains low in many parts of the world. Analysing the views of stakeholders has aided in identifying barriers to adoption of pain mitigation and the need to address misconceptions surrounding the efficacy, availability, safety and costs associated with pain relief. Although veterinarians are able to provide pain control under extra-label drug use, approval of additional analgesics for use in food animals is also needed. Collaborative efforts to increase the availability and adoption of polled (hornless) dairy cattle genetics should be pursued as this avoids the need for

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

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dehorning.”

A variety of pain management strategies and studies have been investigated in the past to address the pain caused by these procedures. The administration of a local anaesthetic in combination with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs has been shown to provide effective pain control throughout the intra and post-operative periods. These findings have informed a number of policies – the Council of Europe (which represents 47 member countries) recommends the use of pain relief when disbudding calves more than four weeks old. In Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands pain relief is legally required when disbudding/dehorning calves regardless of age.

The researchers hope that the study will be useful for those who are working in the veterinary industry and those seeking to improve cow welfare.

Further information

Subscribers to the Animal Welfare Journal will find this paper (*Stakeholder views on treating pain due to dehorning dairy calves*) in Volume 24 issue 4. The full abstract of the study can be read at UFAW's website <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/the-ufaw-journal/animal-welfare>.

If you wish to read the full paper, you can visit [ingentaconnect.com](http://www.ingentaconnect.com) to access the paper for \$25 (US) plus taxes.

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/search/article?option1=tka&value1=Stakeholder+views+on+treating+pain+due+to+dehorning+dairy+calves&pageSize=10&index=1>

Those purchasing the paper or choosing to subscribe to the Animal Welfare journal will be supporting UFAW's work.

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Note to editors:

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals' needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

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UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

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