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Attitudes of beef producers to disbudding and perception of pain in cattle

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Abstract

Pain is an indicator of welfare status in livestock, and attitudes play a key role in the assessment and treatment of pain in animals. Veterinarians' and dairy producers' perceptions of cattle pain are affected by gender, age and work experience. The aim of this paper was to study beef producers' attitudes regarding disbudding as well as the painfulness of certain cattle diseases. A questionnaire was sent out to 1,000 Finnish beef producers and the response rate was 44%, representing 19% of all Finnish beef producers. Producers graded their attitudes on a five-point Likert scale and perception about pain on an eleven-point numerical scale. Factor analysis was used and four factors were established. These factors described producers' assessment of disbudding-related pain, their sensitivity to pain in cattle, their willingness to self-medicate disbudded calves and their perceived importance of horns. Factor scores were tested for differences between genders and the use of disbudding on farms with Mann Whitney U-tests. Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to assess differences among producers' age, work experience and herd size. Female beef producers assessed animal pain higher than male beef producers. Older and more experienced beef producers showed more positive attitudes towards cattle with horns than younger or less-experienced ones. Older beef producers were more sensitive to cattle pain than younger producers and beef producers with a smaller herd size took disbudding pain more seriously and were more sensitive to cattle pain than the producers with larger herds. Producers who did not use disbudding valued horns more than producers using disbudding.

Keywords: animal welfare, attitude, beef producer, cattle pain, disbudding, human-animal relationship