Coping with citizen demands: a field study of suckling processes in dairy herds

A very strong demand from citizens, catalysed by abolitionist associations

Paris: in the subway

Her Mother's Day dream

Watch her baby grow

But that won't happen

See Ventura et al., 2013
To leave the calves with their mother (or a nurse cow):

Is it possible?

Is it relevant?
To leave the calves with their mother (or a nurse cow):

It's already done in the field:

- For organic farming:
  - « calves to be fed with natural / entire milk, ideally from their mother, for at least 3 months »
- As well as for others

Identify, via a survey:

- Who are these farmers?
- What are their main motivations?
- What are their main practices?
- What are the impacts felt?
Investigation process

Farms involved (102/155)

Selection by network

Towards a representative diversity of systems

Data collection
January/March 2018

Data processing
Descriptive statistics
Results: **Who are these farm(ers)?**

A wide **diversity** of systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmers</th>
<th>Min-Max</th>
<th>Median value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(y)</td>
<td>19-65</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTWU</td>
<td>0.5-8.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Min-Max</th>
<th>Median value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(ha)</td>
<td>11-500</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number</td>
<td>8-210</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56%  
Plain and mountain, Farm product Housing, Milking facilities, Calving season ...
Results: What are their main motivations?

Of the calves: mainly diarrhea and growth (52)

Saving time (41)
Simplification of the work (47)
Reduced penibility (for calf feed, 32)

Milk vs milk replacers prices, recovery of milk not marketed... (37)

And also: organic, natural, animal welfare, recommendation, attractiveness, places available in the barn, willingness to keep older cows...
Results: What are their main practices?

A wide diversity of practices

Fed by Mother (FBM); n = 59
Fed by Nurse (FBN); n = 13
FBN / FBM; n = 30
Results: What are their main practices?

A wide **diversity** of practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>From 7 to 180 d</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access for suckling</td>
<td>From 2*30’/d (mainly before milking) to full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Λ♂ selling/renewal</td>
<td>From equivalent to 19d for selling and 180d for Λ♀ renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>From 1 to 6 calves/cow. Average 2.3 calves/cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>From entire separation to keeping calf and mother in the same building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: What are the impacts felt?

- Less diarrheas and mastitis frequency
- Calves: better growth (Cows? Some difficulties when milking)
- Limited or no impact on milk production
- Some handling problems with heifers
  Cows and calves cry at weaning (2.5d)
  Some troubles with nurse

Improved working comfort
In conclusion: to leave the calves with their mother (or a nurse cow), it’s possible

**In our survey:**

- A positive effect on calves health
- Positive effect on average body gain
- Improving working conditions
- No negative effects on cow reproductive performance either for heifers than cows
- Increasing stress intensity at weaning, especially when age of calf is increasing
- Heifers more fearful

But no information from farmers who have stopped this practice
In conclusion: to leave the calves with their mother (or a nurse cow), it’s possible

**DIVERSITY** of breed, equipment, suckling systems, milking systems...

**DIFFERENT** motivations, with respect of production systems, localisation ...

Numerous **POSSIBILITIES** for each farm

**CONVICED AND MOTIVATED** farmers, ready to share their experience

**ADVISERS** are missing !!!
To leave the calves with their mother (or a nurse cow):

Is it possible?

Is it relevant?
Many thanks to:

**Farmers** for their participation in this study

People who helped in the successful completion of this study, and particularly, get the contacts of farmers

**Students**

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