

Ig Nobel: Researchers named the cream of the crop

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Newcastle scientists Dr Catherine Douglas and Dr Peter Rowlinson have won the Ig Nobel Prize for Veterinary Medicine for their work looking at reducing stress levels in dairy cattle. In a paper [published earlier this year](#), they described how giving a cow a name and treating her as an individual can increase a farmer's annual milk yield by almost 500 pints.

Led by Dr Douglas, the research found that just as people respond better to the personal touch, cows also feel happier and more relaxed if they are given a bit more one-to-one attention.

The Ig Nobel Prizes, now in their 19th year, honour achievements that first make people laugh, and then make them think and last night Dr Douglas said she was "surprised and delighted" with the award.

"The amusing side of the research that the media picked up on was that giving a cow a name meant she produced more milk and there was a lot of light-hearted discussion around what the best name might be and lists of the top ten names for a cow," says Dr Douglas, who gave birth to her first child Flora just five weeks ago and was unable to travel to the US to collect the award in person.

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"But on a serious note our research was all about improving animal

welfare. We showed that by improving the human-animal relationship and giving more individual attention, such as calling a [cow](#) by her name or interacting with her more as she grows up, you can reduce the levels of [stress](#). Stress produces the hormone cortisol which can impair milk production so reducing the stress levels leads to an increase in yield.”

The Ig Nobels are “intended to celebrate the unusual, honor the imaginative -- and spur people's interest in science, medicine, and technology.”

Collecting the award at Harvard University's historic Sanders Theatre was project supervisor Dr Rowlinson, based in Newcastle University's School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

He said: “On the one hand these awards are light-hearted and fun but they also have a strong underlying message that just because something makes us laugh doesn't mean it isn't sound, or potentially important, science.”

More information: More on this research: [Names give cows a lotta bottle](#)

Provided by Newcastle University

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