

Dairy cattle found to have less stable personality traits during puberty

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A team of researchers at the University of British Columbia has found

that dairy cattle have less stable personality traits during puberty. In their paper published in the journal *Royal Society Open Science*, the group describes experiments they carried out with dairy cattle and what they learned.

In recent years, the public has become more aware of the treatment of animals used as a food source. And because a lot of such treatment has been criticized, livestock managers have started to look at how their charges are treated, and in some cases, look for ways to improve. In this new effort, the researchers wondered if [dairy cows](#) have different personalities, and if so, whether such differences might make a difference in how they respond to treatment by humans.

Prior research has found that adult [dairy](#) cows have few personality differences—likewise with calves. But to date, there is little to no data on dairy cow personality differences during [puberty](#). Research and anecdotal evidence has shown that puberty in humans and other species is often a time of unpredictable and sometimes rash behavior—a hint that cows might experience similar behavior.

To learn more about possible personality or behavioral differences in cows as they pass through puberty, the researchers observed young cows alone in an arena noting how they responded to different scenarios. The various scenarios involved placing unfamiliar objects or people into the area with the cows to see how they responded to them. The cows ranged in age from one year to two and a half years old. To assess personality, the researchers created a scorecard with traits such as boldness and openness to exploring their new surroundings, and graded all of the cows in the study.

The scores showed that the youngest calves demonstrated very few [personality](#) or behavioral differences. The same was true for the oldest cows. But those in the puberty age range varied wildly—some were very

bold, some very shy. Some were more than willing to check out every part of the arena, whereas others looked for a place to hide. The scores also suggest that dairy cows going through puberty might need to be treated as individuals to optimize contentment—a finding dairy farmers might find useful. Contented cows have been shown to grow into bigger and healthier cows, and to produce more milk.

More information: Long-term consistency of personality traits of cattle, *Royal Society Open Science* (2020). royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.191849

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