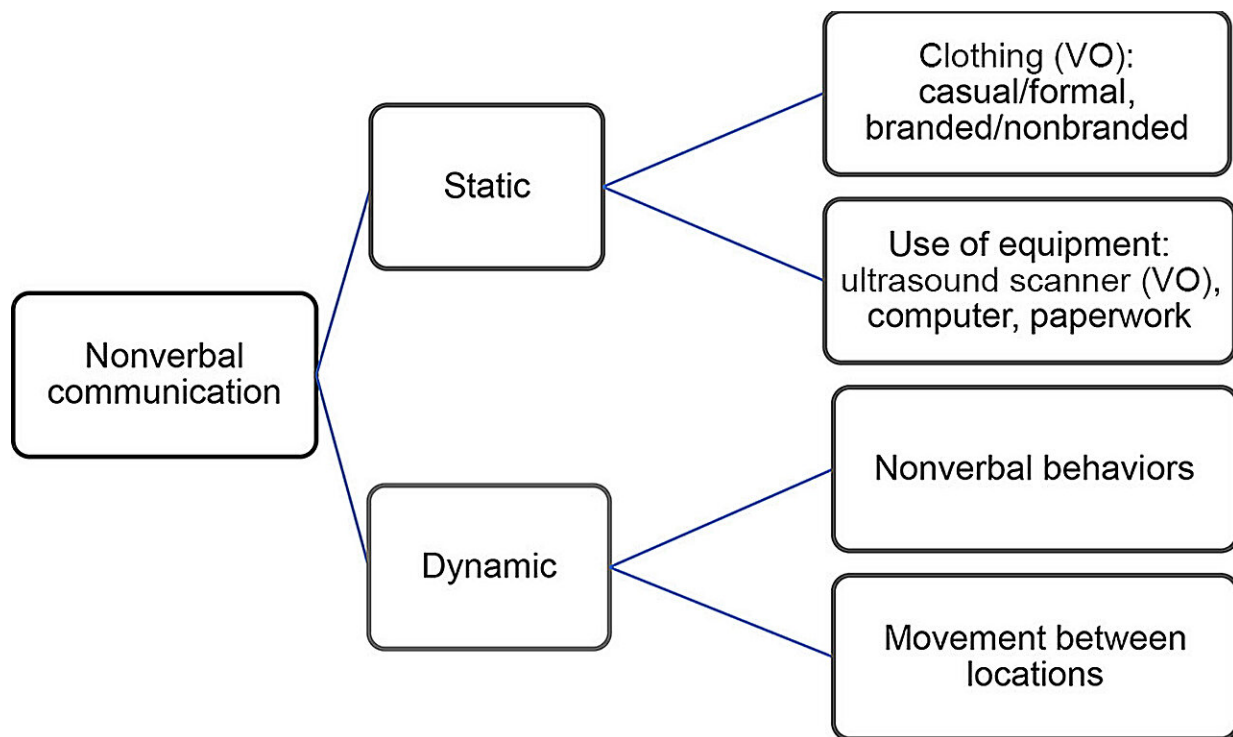


Understanding of cues between dairy farmers and veterinarians could boost rapport, trust, and outcomes

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Details of static and dynamic nonverbal communication identified for veterinarian and farmer [or veterinarian only (VO)] during routine on-farm consultations. Credit: *Journal of Dairy Science* (2023). DOI: 10.3168/jds.2022-22479

Effective communication is an essential skill for dairy veterinarians,

helping them translate clinical recommendations to their farmers, strengthen the farmer-veterinary relationship, and ultimately benefit the herd. However, less is known about the role of nonverbal communication—eye contact, body orientation, gestures, and more—for veterinarians working in dairy.

In [a recent study](#) in the *Journal of Dairy Science*, researchers provide an essential first step toward measuring and understanding unspoken [communication](#) between dairy [veterinarians](#) and their [farmers](#), paving the way for more effective on-farm conversations and improved outcomes.

The study's lead investigator, Fiona MacGillivray, MRCVS, of MacVet Cattle Communications Limited in Cheshire, United Kingdom, explained, "Human medicine and companion animal medicine studies have shown how nonverbal cues can build warmth, connection, and ultimately improve patient and client outcomes, but much less is known about them in the context of interactions on a [dairy farm](#)."

MacGillivray and the study team analyzed video recordings of 11 routine dairy herd consultations made using GoPro cameras worn by the veterinarian, farmer, and an observer of their interactions. The recordings were then broken down and analyzed according to four different stages of the visit including the introduction, the fertility examination of the cow, discussion, and the closing.

Using this data, the study team developed a framework for coding and measuring different forms of nonverbal communication happening between veterinarian and farmer, from static attributes such as clothing worn and equipment used, to dynamic attributes such as distance, body orientation and lean, height differences, head and limb positioning, and gestures. Their study then presents results including trends observed, along with discussion on potential opportunities and barriers for

unspoken communication during consultations.

MacGillivray said, "We think veterinarians can benefit from having an awareness of the impact [nonverbal cues](#) can have and use these findings immediately in their practice, as many aspects of nonverbal communication are likely to influence their ability to effect change on-farm."

The team was careful to explain that this framework is just the first step in helping researchers establish links between unspoken communication and empathy, farmer satisfaction, uptake of veterinary advice, and more. Learning more, through further research and training of practitioners and students in nonverbal communication skills, could help veterinarians recognize and respond to farmers' emotions, increase effectiveness of conversations, and strengthen the farmer-veterinarian relationship.

MacGillivray said, "Becoming a skilled reader of unspoken cues can help veterinarians recognize when a farmer is unconvinced or disengaged despite saying otherwise and help navigate concerns, improve conversations, and critically improve herd health in the long run."

More information: F. MacGillivray et al, Communicating without words: Measuring nonverbal communication between veterinarians and farmers during routine herd health consultations, *Journal of Dairy Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.3168/jds.2022-22479](https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2022-22479)

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