

Cross-sucking and intersucking in dairy buffaloes

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We assessed the incidence and the potential risk factors for cross-sucking in calves and intersucking in lactating cows in 33 buffalo farms. Three female trained assessors collected the data through a questionnaire including resource and management measures, which were directly taken and asked to the farmer, respectively. The incidences of cross-sucking and intersucking were also asked to the farmer while mortality was collected from farm recordings. The farm was used as experimental unit. For each categorical risk factor an ANOVA was performed to assess the association with outcome variables, whereas for continuous risk factors the association was tested using Pearson correlation coefficients. Cross-sucking and intersucking were observed in 90% and 42% of the farms, respectively; their mean incidences were 20.4 ± 25.7 and 1.8 ± 1.2 (mean \pm SD), respectively. Surprisingly, cross-sucking tended to be positively correlated with the age of separation from the mother ($n=20$, $r=0.39$, $P=0.08$). It also tended to be negatively associated with space allowance ($n=20$, $r=-0.38$, $P=0.11$). In addition, a positive correlation between cross-sucking and calf mortality was observed ($n=20$, $r=0.45$, $P=0.06$). The incidence of intersucking was positively correlated with the number of buffalo cows on the farm ($n=33$, $r=0.45$, $P=0.01$) and the number of dry animals per pen ($n=33$, $r=0.36$, $P=0.04$). The presence of cross-sucking in the categories of weaned calves and heifers induced a higher incidence of intersucking ($F_{1,31}=3.3$, $P=0.08$ and $F_{1,31}=12.2$, $P=0.01$, respectively). We conclude that appropriate management strategies should be implemented in order to reduce the incidence of cross-sucking and intersucking. In addition, the onset of cross-sucking in young stock, such as weaned calves and heifers, may favour the development of intersucking in lactating buffaloes.