What happens with cow behavior when replacing concrete slatted floor by rubber coating: A case study.

An enhanced productive life cycle and improved animal welfare are aims pursued in dairy husbandry. This study assesses experimental observations on floor-associated behavior during the stepwise replacement of concrete slatted flooring by rubber mats. For this purpose, estrus (mounting) and hygiene behavior (licking while standing on 3 legs and caudal licking) within a herd of 50 loose-housed Brown Swiss dairy cows were analyzed by video observation before and after floor reconstruction. Still photographs and pedometers were used to assess step length and number of steps, representing walking behavior. Compared with the concrete floor surface, rubber coating led to an increase in step length (58 ± 1 vs. 70 ± 1 cm; n = 35) and in steps per day (4,226 ± 450 vs. 5,611 ± 495; mean ± SEM; n = 9). Mounting was higher on the flooring covered with rubber mats (23 vs. 112). Collapsing or slipping during mounting only occurred on concrete slatted flooring (in 19 out of 23 mounting actions). Licking while standing on 3 legs and caudal licking increased up to 4-fold (105 vs. 511 observations). In conclusion, improvements were found in behavior when rubber-coated slatted floor surfaces were used in dairy cattle housing in transition from concrete flooring. Disorders in estrus and hygiene behavior were associated with the flooring of the barn and were relatively easy to investigate within the framework of
farm welfare assessments

Stichworte: Dairy cattle, behavior, concrete floor, rubber covering

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