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ABSTRACT A human's attitude towards animals influences their behavior around animals, thus affecting the quality of the human–animal relationship (HAR). Many scientific studies have demonstrated that cattle's fear-response to humans affects their productivity, behavior, and welfare. In the scientific literature thus far it is believed that fear of humans is the predominant relationship on dairy farms. Via a postal questionnaire, we gathered subjective information from 516 stock managers on reported indicators of the HAR and their opinions of the HAR on UK dairy farms. We found that only 21% of farmers believed that dairy cattle were fearful of humans. Respondents accepted that humans can have an impact on cattle temperament, as 48% of respondents attributed a cow's docility to previous human contact and reasons given for poor milking temperament included previous negative experiences with humans (9%). Ninety percent of respondents thought cows had feelings, and 78% thought cows were intelligent. Higher heifer milk yields (≥ 200 liters) were found in herds where the stock manager thought it important to know every individual animal, although this was only a trend ($p = 0.14$). On farms where cows were called by name, milk yield was 258 liters higher than on farms where this was not the case ($p < 0.001$). As a person's attitude is a good predictor of their behavior, these subjective reports suggest UK dairy farmers have a good quality of human–animal relationship with their animals. The pattern for improved milk yield and behavior based on increased human attention to the individual animal requires validation, but it is an encouraging finding based on reported opinions analyzed against objective production data in a survey of commercial farms.

Keywords: attitudes, dairy cattle, milk production, stock manager, stock-personship

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