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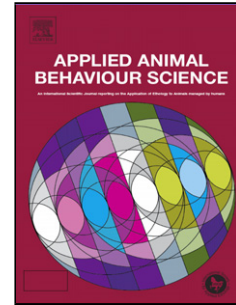
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The behaviour of housed dairy cattle with and without pasture access: a review

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Highlights

- Many factors affect cow preference for pasture, including previous experience
- Cows prefer the shelter provided by housing as the weather gets more extreme
- Pasture access for dairy cows can bring health, welfare and production benefits
- Precision technologies could help bring the benefits of pasture to indoors

ABSTRACT

With more dairy cows being housed indoors, for at least part of the year, it is important to understand how housing impacts on 'normal behaviour' and the implications for cow welfare. For cows on pasture, nutritional requirements and climatic conditions are the major concerns, whilst indoor housing systems can restrict natural behaviours and reduce health as incidences of lameness and mastitis increase. When given a choice to be at pasture or in cubicle housing, studies have shown that time of day, season, and where feed is provided can influence preference. Previous experience also had a big effect on pasture preference: the longer calves/heifers/cows were reared without experience of pasture the stronger their preference for housing. The ontogeny of grazing also requires pasture experience i.e. the instinctive foraging behaviour of calves is to suckle and they have to learn through experience how to graze. These results raise the question: if cattle are to be housed for part of the year, would it be better to house them continuously? Other results would suggest not, as there are clear production, health and welfare benefits

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