

Behaviour of Parda de Montaña cow-calf pairs in restricted suckling systems



J. Álvarez-Rodríguez, J. Palacio, I. Casasús, R. Revilla, A. Sanz*
CITA, Gobierno de Aragón, P.O. Box. 727, 50080 Zaragoza, Spain (*asanz@aragon.es)



OBJECTIVE

- ✓ To ascertain the maternal behaviour of Parda de Montaña cows (old Brown Swiss selected for beef purpose) managed under one or two suckling sessions (30 min/each) per day during lactation.



MATERIAL AND METHODS

- 16 multiparous autumn-calving cows (BCS at calving 2.6) with their calves (9 males - 7 females).
- Two restricted suckling systems from the day after parturition:
 - a. Once daily (0800 h) (RS1).
 - b. Twice daily (0800 and 1500 h) (RS2).

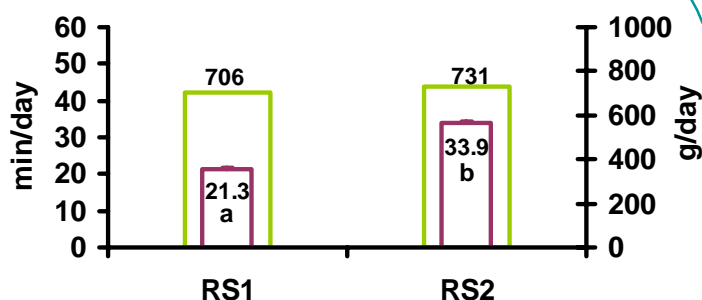
MEASUREMENTS

- **Focal observation** of behaviour trends during **suckling** (days 30, 66 and 100 postpartum).
- **Live-weight** weekly during lactation.

RESULTS

- ✓ **Similar cow ADG** during lactation (0.026 and -0.064 g/day in RS1 and RS2) ($P>0.05$).
- ✓ **Longer suckling duration per day in RS2** ($P<0.05$) but **similar calf ADG** in both systems ($P>0.05$) (Figure).
- ✓ Significant **correlation** between **suckling duration** per session and number of **butts** towards cow udder ($r=0.53$; $P<0.001$).

■ suckling duration per day ■ calf ADG



Variable #	RS1 (08 h)	RS2 (08 h)	RS2 (08-15 h)
Cow-calf close each other (min)	26.5a,x	23.8y	22.1b
Duration of first suckling bout (min)	17.3a	15.3	13.9b
Suckling duration per session (min)	21.3a	18.3	17.0b
Suckling bouts (number)	2.7	2.4	2.3
Cross-suckling duration (min)	1.8	1.8	1.4
Licks of cow towards own calf (number)	55.5	13.8	22.5
Licks of cow itself (number)	0.1b	1.0	2.7a
Butts towards cow udder per session (number)	46.3	45.4	42.7

Similar duration of suckling in the morning session in RS1 and RS2 but greater on average in RS1.

Similar pattern of suckling and cross-suckling duration within sessions across systems.

More licks of cow itself in RS2.

Other activities as cow-calf playing (0.1 min/session) and exploring/eating straw bed (0.8 min/session) only registered in RS2.

x, y indicate significant differences ($P<0.05$) between RS1 (08 h) and RS2 (08 h) and a, b between RS1 (08 h) and RS2 (08-15 h).

CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ The cow-calf behaviour patterns observed were not altered by restricting suckling once daily, allowing the establishment of maternal bonding.
- ✓ Suckling once daily for at least 30 min is a handling practice without negative effects on cow-calf performance.