

CALVES ARE HAPPIER ON SOLID FEED

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- **Low fibre diet leads to frustrated behaviour .**
 - **'European directive should be adjusted'**
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Veal calves are fattened on a diet comprising of a lot of 'milk replacer' and limited amounts of fibrous feeds. From the welfare point of view, they should get more solid feed, state Wageningen researchers. Two weeks after birth, the calves are transported from the dairy farm to the veal calf farmer, who delivers them to the slaugh-

terhouse at the age of six months. The buyers want pale veal, because overseas consumers prefer it. Veal calves therefore get a low-fibre diet because the iron in the fibre would lead to the less desirable rosé veal. The main feed is milk replacer, supplemented with concentrates.

The calves like milk in their first few weeks, but later develop into ruminants. With little solid feed in their diet, they cannot display their natural behaviours: chewing and ruminating. In frustration, they start displaying abnormal behaviours such as che-

wing on nothing, rolling their tongues and biting on railings or troughs. Over four months, researcher Laura Webb fed calves on a Wageningen UR experimental farm four different diets, with four different amounts of solid

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feed. Only the calves that received the highest amount of solid feed showed less frustration in the form of abnormal behaviour, Webb concludes in this month's

issue of Applied Animal Behaviour Science.

According to Webb, the European legislation on veal calves feed should be reassessed. This directive states that calves of 8 weeks old should get a minimum of 50 grams of solid feed and calves of 20 weeks old should get 250 grams minimum. These minimum amounts should be increased for the sake of animal welfare, says Webb. **AS**