

Treat the udder with care

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I haven't lived close to cows for around ten years now. I used to live on a dairy farm where cows, calves and heifers were part of my close reality. I knew how to approach a cow, respect the space around her and treat her udder with care.

Before milking we would gather the cows or in the summer fetch them from the field. We would round them up and chase them into the milking parlour. First we'd use the water hoses to wash down the manure, and with my hands in rubber gloves I'd clean the udder from any dried in dirt. Next step would be using a soft cloth drenched in warm soapy water that we would wash the udders with.

Before putting on the milking machines we would test milk every cow in a milk testing cup. We would test to see if there was anything wrong, like blood in the milk. This would be the most challenging part for me: to use my hands to squeeze the milk out of the teats. To create enough space between my index finger and thumb, following with the other fingers, squeezing and pressing the milk out of the cow's teat. Both my parents would immediately achieve a strong stream of milk. For me it would be exciting, as it would differ in when and in what direction the milk came out.

Putting on the milking machine you first need to release the vacuum and turn the cups so that they will suck on to the different teats. Some cows, usually the first-calvers, will sometimes try to kick off the milking machine. Then you would need to clean the machine before putting it on again. I'd try to calm down the cow by patting and stroking her back leg, even though I would sometimes feel scared. At the end of milking we'd spray a lubricating antiseptic on the teats, keeping them from cracking and preventing infection.

After a while you'd learn which udder belongs to which cow, if the cow tends to kick or not or if she has an extra teat or two. Tuffy, my old showing calf, had very wide teats that felt like they had a void inside of them, and surprisingly they would be filled with milk.

When waiting for their time to milk, Tuffy and Bella (another old showing calf) would lean over the milking parlour, asking to get patted. I'd rub their foreheads and pat their neck, both giving a calming impression. In that moment I would belong *with* them, and they would belong *to* me.