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Tail wagging while suckling might have communication purposes between the lambs and their mothers (*Ovis aries*)

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Lambs wag their tails vigorously during suckling. However, in many countries tail docking is a routine husbandry procedure, regardless of the possible functions that this behavior might have. To determine if tail wagging could serve as an element of communication in the ewe-lamb relationship, 14 ewes and their 4-days-old lambs were alternatively assigned to one of two groups; 2 singles, 4 doubles and 1 triple in each group. In the treated group (T) the tail was immobilized by the use of an adhesive tape that kept it temporarily attached to the right leg of the lamb, while the rest of the animals remained intact as controls. Animals were observed for 8 days, 4 days in each treatment. Each experimental day, lambs were separated from their mothers during 30 min and individually weighed before reunited with their mothers. From this point, all animals were observed for 20 min, and weighed again at the end of this period to estimate milk consumption, resuming observations until 60 min were completed. Sucking frequencies and the number of contacts between the mother's nose and the caudal region of her offspring(s) while suckling were quantified. Similar ($P>0.05$) milk consumption was observed (11.8 ± 4.4 vs. 11.6 ± 4.5 g/20 min of observation between C and T lambs, respectively). In average, C lambs displayed shorter ($P<0.05$) and more frequent suckling periods than T lambs (15.8 ± 0.7 vs. 19.2 ± 1.0 s, and 11.4 ± 1.3 vs. 10.7 ± 1.2 episodes/h, respectively) and were checked fewer times by their mothers while suckling (1.4 ± 0.1 vs. 1.7 ± 0.1 times/suckling period, for C and T lambs respectively). Further research is needed to determine if these differences would lead to a better efficiency of milk consumption or heavier animals. It was concluded that tail wagging might have communication purposes between the lambs and their mothers while suckling.

Biography

Agustín Orihuela has his expertise and passion in improving animal production and wellbeing. His investigations are generally based on the application of the behavior of the animals with productive purposes. Recently, he has started work in the area of painful animal production practices; investigating alternatives and methods that reduce or eliminate the pain caused by these procedures. He explores different areas in animal science, generating management strategies that allow sustainable livestock raising, encouraging humane treatment of animals and increasing production.

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