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1 **Identification of possible new salivary biomarkers of stress in sheep using a high-**  
2 **resolution quantitative proteomic technique**

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23

24 **Abstract**

25           The aim of this study was to identify biological pathways and proteins differentially  
26 expressed in the saliva proteome of sheep after the application of a model of stress, using  
27 high-resolution quantitative proteomics. In addition, one of the proteins differently expressed  
28 was verified and evaluated as a possible biomarker of stress in this species. Saliva paired  
29 samples from eight sheep before and after the application of a model of stress based on  
30 shearing were analysed using tandem mass tags (TMT). The TMT analysis allowed for the  
31 identification of new stress-related metabolic pathways and revealed 13 proteins differentially  
32 expressed between before and after the stress. Six of these proteins pertain to four major  
33 metabolic pathways affected, namely: canonical glycolysis, oxygen transport, neural nucleus  
34 development, and regulation of actin cytoskeleton reorganization. The rest of proteins were  
35 unmapped original proteins such as acyl-coenzyme-A-binding protein; complement C3;  
36 alpha-2-macroglobulin isoform-X1; type-II small proline-rich protein; lactoferrin;  
37 secretoglobin family-1D-member; and keratin, type-II cytoskeletal 6. Of these proteins, based  
38 on its biological significance and specific immunoassay availability, lactoferrin was selected  
39 for further validation. The immunoassay intra- and inter-assay coefficients of variation were  
40 lower than 13%. The method showed good linearity under dilution and recovery, and the  
41 detection limit was low enough to detect salivary lactoferrin levels. A significant decrease ( $P$   
42  $< 0.01$ ) in salivary lactoferrin concentration in the sheep following the application of the  
43 model of stress was observed, suggesting that this protein could be a potential salivary  
44 biomarker of stress situations in sheep.

45

46 *Keywords:* Ovine, Lactoferrin, Saliva, Stress, TMT analysis

## 47 **1. Introduction**

48 In recent years, there has been growing interest for the identification of biomarkers in  
49 saliva to monitor animal welfare. Saliva sampling is a noninvasive and stress-free procedure  
50 and can represent an alternative to blood sampling, which has been demonstrated to be a  
51 confounding factor in stress studies of animals (Merlot et al., 2011; Escribano et al., 2013). In  
52 addition, the ability to perform multiple saliva procedures without an evident influence on the  
53 stress response of animals has been an advantage in trials in which the immediate response of  
54 an animal to a stressor is studied (Heintz et al., 2011). Furthermore, saliva collection requires  
55 only modest levels of personnel training, facilitating animal monitoring in remote locations  
56 (Fuentes et al., 2016).

57 Proteomic techniques have become widely employed as useful tool for the search of  
58 novel biomarkers in biofluids. The comparative quantitative analysis of complex protein  
59 samples can be achieved either with two-dimensional gel electrophoresis-based proteomics or  
60 gel-free mass spectrometry-based approaches using isobaric tagging options such as isobaric  
61 tags for relative and absolute quantification (iTRAQ) and tandem mass tags (TMT). These  
62 novel technologies that employ isobaric tags have emerged in the last few years and are  
63 becoming widely employed, since they are highly reproducible and sensitive and allow for the  
64 relative simultaneous quantification of differentially labelled peptides (Baeumlisberger et al.,  
65 2010; Dayon et al., 2011; Giron et al., 2011). In veterinary science, recent investigations using  
66 these novel quantitative technologies to detect possible biomarkers of diagnostic and  
67 understand the prognosis of diseases in dogs (Martínez-Subiela et al., 2017; Franco-Martínez  
68 et al., 2018) have been reported. Also, studies performed in sheep using these techniques to  
69 evaluate the alterations in the intestine associated with under weaning stress using jejunum  
70 samples (Cui et al., 2018) or to consider age-related changes in the cerebrospinal fluid (Chen  
71 et al., 2018) have been published. However, to the best of our knowledge, no reports currently

72 exist on the use of isobaric tagging technology in saliva samples to detect possible biomarkers  
73 of stress in sheep.

74 Despite this lack of published research, in the last several years, there has been  
75 increasing interest in the measurement of saliva biomarkers to evaluate stress in sheep, and  
76 analytes such as cortisol, alpha-amylase, and lipase have been assayed to determine their  
77 increase in concentration after different stressful stimuli (Fuentes et al., 2016; Messori et al.,  
78 2017; Contreras-Aguilar et al., 2018). The insight in various biological pathways in saliva  
79 induced by stress as well the identification of new proteins that can change in stressful  
80 situations can help researchers to gain knowledge about the status of salivary secretory  
81 proteome components and to identify new possible biomarkers that may be helpful to  
82 prevention of the stress situations.

83 The hypothesis of our study was that the application of TMT proteomic technology in  
84 sheep saliva samples could uncover novel pathways and identify new proteins capable of  
85 changing in situations of stress that could be considered as novel stress biomarkers. To test  
86 this hypothesis, the objectives of the present study were; (1) the identification of the metabolic  
87 pathways and proteins differentially represented in the saliva after stress by proteomic  
88 approach; (2) the selection of at least one protein, differentially expressed after stressors, and  
89 its validation by immunoassay and evaluation as a possible biomarker of stress in sheep.

90

## 91 **2. Materials and methods**

### 92 *2.1 Animal and sampling procedures*

93 Details describing sheep model, in which salivary biomarkers of stress were evaluated,  
94 was published in a recent paper (Contreras-Aguilar et al., 2018).

95 Saliva samples of eight Montesina sheep, sub-breed of Manchega, originally from  
96 southeast Spain, located at the Education Farm of the University of Murcia (Spain), were

97 used. The day of the experiment, the whole flock of 40 sheep was moved to a compound of 26  
98 m<sup>2</sup> outside in the open air, and the sheep were acclimatized for 30 minutes. A basal saliva  
99 sample (baseline or the sample before the application of a stress stimulus) was taken from  
100 sheep selected prior to stress induction. The animals were removed from the flock one at a  
101 time and the stress stimulus implemented, which consisted of being sheared with a shearing  
102 machine for approximately five minutes. The samples collected just after shearing were used  
103 in the proteomic study, and the samples were selected on the basis of significant increases of  
104 salivary biomarkers (cortisol, alpha-amylase and lipase) showed by Contreras et al. (2018).

105 Saliva samples were obtained using placing a sponge in the mouth. When sponges  
106 were thoroughly moist, they were placed in plastic tubes (Salivette; Sarstedt,  
107 Aktiengesellschaft & Co., Nümbrecht, Germany), centrifuged (3,000 g for 10 min, 4°C), and  
108 the supernatant was aliquoted and kept at -80°C until analysis. The results of salivary  
109 biomarkers from freshly obtained saliva samples were reported in the previous study  
110 (Contreras-Aguilar et al., 2018). The aliquots of samples were stored, approximately for a  
111 year, at -80°C until proteomic analysis (Internal Disease Clinic, Faculty of Veterinary  
112 Medicine, University of Zagreb in Zagreb, Croazia).

113

## 114 *2.2 Proteomic study of saliva samples from sheep and Liquid Chromatography Mass*

### 115 *Spectrometry (LC-MS/MS)*

116 Two groups were formed in the proteomic study, one containing eight samples  
117 obtained prior to the stress induction and another containing eight samples of the same  
118 animals obtained after the stress. Saliva proteins were acetone-precipitated (six volumes of  
119 ice-cold acetone, overnight), dissolved in 100 mM of triethylammonium bicarbonate (TEAB)  
120 (pH 8.5) and protein concentration was obtained by bicinchoninic acid (BCA) assay. A pooled

121 sample, generated by mixing equal protein quantity of all sixteen samples was employed as an  
122 internal standard in all TMT six-plex experiments.

123 For each sample, proteins were submitted to reduction, alkylation and digestion and  
124 labelled using six-plex TMT reagents following manufacturer instructions (Thermo Fisher  
125 Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) with some modifications, as reported by Martínez-Subiela et  
126 al. (2017). In short, 35 µg of proteins was reduced with 200 mM of 1,4-Dithiothreitol (DTT)  
127 (Sigma-Aldrich, S t. Louis, MO, USA), alkylated with 375 mM of iodoacetamide (Sigma-  
128 Aldrich, S t. Louis, MO, USA) and precipitated with ice-cold acetone (VWR Corp., Radnor,  
129 PA, USA) overnight. Saliva samples were then centrifuged and the acetone was eliminated by  
130 decantation. Afterward, 50µL of 100 mM TEAB buffer were used to resuspend the pellets and  
131 digested with trypsin (Promega Corp., Madison, WI, USA) overnight at 37°C (trypsin-to-  
132 protein ratio 1:35, w/w). The reagents of TMT labelling were equilibrated and resuspended  
133 with anhydrous acetonitrile LC–MS grade (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA)  
134 and added to each saliva sample. For one hour the labelling reaction was incubated (at room  
135 temperature) and then 5% hydroxylamine for 15 minutes (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham,  
136 MA, USA) was added to each sample for its inactivation. Samples were mixed at same  
137 amounts (5 µg) and then were vacuum-dried and kept at -80°C before additional LC–MS/MS  
138 analysis. The LC–MS/MS analysis was performed using the Dionex Ultimate 3000 RSLC  
139 nano flow system (Dionex, Camberley, UK) and the Orbitrap Q Exactive Plus mass  
140 spectrometer (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) as reported by Horvatić et al.  
141 (2018). For protein identification and relative quantification Proteome Discoverer (version  
142 2.0., Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) was used for the SEQUEST search  
143 against *Ovis aries* FASTA files downloaded from NCBI database (18/05/2018, 70016  
144 sequences) according to parameters set as follows: precursor and fragment mass tolerances of  
145 10 ppm and 0.02 Da, two trypsin missed cleavage sites, respectively; carbamidomethyl (C),

146 oxidation (M), fixed peptide modification, deamidation (N,Q) and TMT six-plex (K, peptide  
147 N-terminus) dynamic modifications. The false discovery rate (FDR) for peptide identification  
148 was calculated using the Percolator algorithm. Proteins with at least two unique peptides and  
149 5% FDR were considered successfully identified. Protein quantification was based on relative  
150 intensities of reporter ions representing differentially labelled peptides selected for MS/MS  
151 fragmentation. To compare relative quantification data, for each protein between the TMT  
152 six-plex experiments, an internal standard was used.

153

## 154 *2.3 Validation of lactoferrin in sheep as possible salivary biomarker of stress*

### 155 *2.3.1 Lactoferrin assay*

156 Lactoferrin was measured using a commercial sheep enzyme-linked immunosorbent  
157 assay (ELISA) kit specific to lactoferrin (sheep lactotransferrin ELISA kit; Cusabio Biotech.,  
158 Ltd. Houston, TX, USA), according to manufacturer instructions.

159

### 160 *2.3.2 Analytical validation*

161 Sheep saliva samples taken before and after applying the model of stress described  
162 above were employed for the validation study of the ELISA assay. The following parameters  
163 were evaluated: intra- and inter-assays precision, linearity, recovery and the limit of detection.  
164 The intra- and inter-assays precision expressed as coefficients of variation (CVs) were  
165 calculated by analysing two pools of saliva samples containing, low and high concentrations  
166 of lactoferrin. Each pool was prepared by mixing saliva samples with similar concentrations  
167 of lactoferrin (previously quantified by the ELISA method used in our study). Inter-assays  
168 CVs were obtained by measuring five time the same pools in different days. Each CV was  
169 calculated as the percentage of the standard deviation (SD) of the replicates divided by the

170 mean. To avoid possible variations due to cycles of thawing and freezing, the saliva samples  
171 were aliquots and only was unfrozen the aliquot needed for each assay.

172 The linearity under dilution was used to evaluate the accuracy of the assay. For it, two  
173 sheep saliva samples with high lactoferrin concentrations were serially diluted in varying  
174 concentrations (e.g., 1:2, 1:4, 1:8, 1:16, 1:32) with an assay buffer. Afterwards, linear  
175 regression between the observed and expected results was performed and the slope, y-  
176 intercept, and coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) were calculated.

177 The detection limit, defined as lowest concentration of lactoferrin that assay can  
178 distinguished from zero value, was calculated based on mean value of 10 replicate  
179 determination of the assay buffer (zero standard) plus three SDs.

180

### 181 *2.3.3 Evaluation of lactoferrin changes after stress*

182 The ability of the ELISA assays to distinguish between the stress levels shown by the  
183 sheep was investigated by comparing saliva samples from 14 sheep before and after the  
184 application of the stress model by shearing for five minutes as previously described for the  
185 proteomic study. The samples analysed were from the 8 sheep using the first part related to  
186 proteomic approach and from 6 additional sheep. 8 sheep were the same used in the first part  
187 related to proteomic approach and another 6 sheep more until completely a total of 14 used  
188 before by Contreras-Aguilar et al. (2018).

189

### 190 *2.4 Gene ontology pathways*

191 The proteomic results obtained in the study were employed for the gene ontology  
192 (GO) analysis. The proteins, encoding in ovine genes, differentially expressed were  
193 transformed to their human orthologs employing the Ensembl orthologs database and its tool  
194 for data mining BioMart (<http://www.ensembl.org/index.html>). Obtained genes were used to

195 add their best known interactors (maximum of 10 per genes) according to the databases  
196 STRING-EMBL, IntAct and Reactome by the utilization of the Cytoscape (v3.6.1) plug-in  
197 CluePedia (v1.5.2) (Shannon et al., 2003; Bindea et al., 2013). Original proteins  
198 (differentially expressed between the two grouping conditions of data, data obtained before  
199 vs. data obtained after stress) and enriched proteins (best interactors of the original proteins)  
200 were then used to determine the GO terms over-represented in this set of proteins by way of  
201 the utilization of the Cytoscape plug-in ClueGO (v2.5.0) (Bindea et al., 2009) on the Homo  
202 sapiens GO-biological process (14/08/2018) (GO level from 3 to 8, minimum number of  
203 genes = 3, minimum percentage = 4, Kappa score threshold = 0.4, two-sided hypergeometric  
204 test with Bonferroni correction). For the REVIGO analysis the GO terms over-represented  
205 were submitted to remove redundant GO terms, the similarity allowed was 0.7 SimRel, and  
206 their functional description defined the groups related GO terms (Supek et al., 2011). Finally,  
207 pathway interactomes were designed in Cytoscape using the radial layout incorporating the  
208 GO data generated by ClueGO and ReviGO (e.g., the number of input genes in GO terms,  
209 associated p-value, GO/proteins relationships, GO groups).

210

## 211 *2.5 Statistical analysis*

212 In order to compare the abundances of proteins identified in the proteomic analysis  
213 between two groups of samples (group of samples before versus group of samples after stress  
214 stimulus) data, by logarithmic transformation, were normalized and Student's t-test (two-  
215 tailed, paired) was used. A  $P < 0.05$  value was considered to be significant. Fold changes (FC)  
216 have been obtained with the formula  $FC = \log_2(\text{Group before} / \text{Group after})$  as has been  
217 reported before (Franco-Martínez et al., 2018). RStudio (v1.0.143) (R Studio Team. RStudio  
218 "RStudio Team. RStudio: Integrated Development Environment for R [Internet]. Boston,

219 MA: RStudio, Inc.; 2015. Available from: <http://www.rstudio.com/>,” 2015) was employed for  
220 statistics.

221 Intra- and interassay CVs of assay were calculated as SD/mean value of repeated  
222 measurements and expressed as percentage (multiplied by 100). Detection limits, linearity  
223 under dilution, linear regression analyses also were performed with Rstudio. Because of the  
224 small sample size, the changes of lactoferrin in sheep between groups for clinical analysis,  
225 before and after of stress stimulus, were assessed by a non-parametric Wilcoxon matched-  
226 pairs test using a commercial statistics package (GraphPad Prism 6, GraphPad Software Inc.,  
227 La Jolla, CA). A  $P < 0.05$  value was considered significant.

228

### 229 **3. Results**

#### 230 *3.1 Proteomic changes of saliva samples from sheep following the model application*

231 A total of 445 proteins were identified, 35 of which showed significant changes in  
232 relation to baseline or to their levels prior to the model application. These proteins appear in  
233 Table 1. Five of them showed a decrease after model application, namely: lactoferrin ( $P =$   
234 0.015); alpha-2-macroglobulin isoform X1 ( $P = 0.034$ ); keratin, type II cytoskeletal 6A ( $P =$   
235 0.039); complement C3 (CC3) ( $P = 0.042$ ); and secretoglobin family 1D member (SCGB1D2)  
236 ( $P = 0.049$ ). Conversely, eight showed an increase after model application, namely:  
237 triosephosphate isomerase isoform X2 ( $P = 0.015$ ), 14-3-3 protein gamma ( $P = 0.039$ ),  
238 phosphoglycerate mutase 1 isoform ( $P = 0.015$ ), acyl-coenzyme-A (CoA)-binding protein ( $P$   
239 = 0.015), hemoglobin subunit beta isoform X2 (HBB) ( $P = 0.023$ ), 14-3-3 protein zeta/delta  
240 isoform X1 ( $P = 0.041$ ), type II small proline-rich protein ( $P = 0.039$ ), and calmodulin-alpha  
241 ( $P = 0.039$ ).

242

#### 243 *3.2 Results of validation of lactoferrin in sheep as possible salivary biomarker of stress*

244 Analytical validation: The intra-assay CVs were 7.1% for the pool with a high  
245 lactoferrin concentration and 8.5 % for the pool with a low lactoferrin concentration.  
246 Additionally, inter-assay CVs were 13 % for the pool with a high lactoferrin concentration  
247 and 11% for the pool with a low lactoferrin concentration, respectively. A linear regression  
248 coefficient of 0.96 was observed when saliva samples with high concentrations diluted 1:2-  
249 fold or greater were analyzed. The analytical limit of detection calculated was 0.15 µg/mL.  
250 Differences between lactoferrin levels obtained before and after of the application of the stress  
251 model are presented in Figure 1. Sheep showed a significant decrease ( $P < 0.01$ ) of salivary  
252 lactoferrin levels after shearing (median: 0.24 µg/mL; range: 0.21–0.26 µg/mL; 25-75th  
253 percentiles) in comparison with the levels observed prior to shearing (median: 0.33 µg/mL;  
254 range: 0.27–0.37 µg/mL; 25-75th percentiles).

255

### 256 *3.3 Bioinformatics*

257 Although 13 proteins representing unique genes were identified as being differentially  
258 expressed between before and after the stress, 38 further proteins were added in the  
259 enrichment step in GO analysis. From the GO analysis, four GO groups were defined as  
260 follow: canonical glycolysis (11 genes,  $-\log_{10} P = 18.3$ ), oxygen transport (five genes,  $-\log_{10}$   
261  $P = 7.6$ ), regulation of actin cytoskeleton reorganization (five genes,  $-\log_{10} P = 5.7$ ), and  
262 neural nucleus development (four genes,  $-\log_{10} P = 3.2$ ) (Figure 2). Representation of GO  
263 terms shows that canonical glycolysis is central and the most relevant pathway in the study  
264 (Figure 3). Proteins belonging to the guanine nucleotide exchange factor (RAPGEF3/4),  
265 optineurin (OPTN) and enolase-3 (ENO3) were at the crossroads between the most important  
266 GO terms despite the fact that they were not identified as differentially expressed in the  
267 current proteomic study.

268

#### 269 **4. Discussion**

270 In this study was used for the first time the TMT technology for protein quantification is  
271 saliva of sheep. In addition, the main proteins differentially represented in this type of sample  
272 and related major metabolic pathways were identified following the application of a model of  
273 acute stress. GO analysis showed that four major metabolic pathways were found to be  
274 significantly affected in sheep saliva after the stress of shearing, namely: canonical glycolysis,  
275 oxygen transport, neural nucleus development, and regulation of actin cytoskeleton  
276 reorganization. In addition, thanks to use of this high-resolution quantitative proteomic  
277 technique, 13 proteins never before described in the saliva of sheep were observed to change  
278 after the experimental stress condition. Six of the proteins identified by TMT technology were  
279 related with the metabolic pathways. Phosphoglycerate mutase 1 isoform X1 (PGAM1) and  
280 triosephosphate isomerase isoform X2 (TPI1) were found to be upregulated in the canonical  
281 glycolysis. PGAM1 catalyses the transfer of phosphate groups from 3-phosphoglycerate to 2-  
282 phosphoglycerate, while the TPI1 genes encodes two proteins or enzymes, which catalyses in  
283 glycolysis the isomerization of glyceraldehydes 3-phosphate (G3P) and, in the  
284 gluconeogenesis, the dihydroxy-acetone phosphate (DHAP). Both proteins, as a part of  
285 glycolytic processes, and catalyse the breakdown of a carbohydrate into pyruvate, with the  
286 concomitant production of energy (Hitosugi et al., 2012). Therefore, these significant  
287 increases in concentration of the above mentioned enzymes might lead to hyperglycaemia in  
288 sheep. The hyperglycaemia represents an immediate response to stress in any species,  
289 providing rapid energy source to meet the energy requirements of fear and the “fight-or-  
290 flight” induced response (Surwit et al., 1992).

291 Another of the metabolic pathways identified in GO analysis of our study was that for  
292 oxygen transport represented by HBB, which was significantly upregulated after the stress of  
293 shearing. This protein is involved in transporting oxygen from the lungs to various peripheral

294 tissues. Therefore, HBB is a protein that could be involved in the “fight-or-flight”-induced  
295 response in sheep in a manner intended to improve oxygen delivery and could also be related  
296 to the stress response. This increase of expression of hemoglobin genes has been reported  
297 before in mice subjected to acute social stress stimulus (Stankiewicz et al., 2014).

298 Calmodulin-alpha (CaM), which is related with the metabolic pathway of neural nucleus  
299 development, was also found to be upregulated in saliva after the stress. CaM is a protein to  
300 Ca<sup>2+</sup>-sensing that is important in many cellular processes (Stevens, 1983) and which  
301 regulates a myriad of target proteins, such as G-protein-coupled receptor, ion channels, and  
302 kinases. As an example, in the Ca<sup>2+</sup>-signalling pathway, CaM regulates and activates the  
303 calcineurin and myosin light chain kinase IV (Kishi et al., 2018). Therefore, CaM plays part  
304 in regulating different biological processes including proliferation, learning and metabolism  
305 (Westerlund and Delemotte, 2018). In addition, calcium has an important role in the effects of  
306 stress hormones (Malinovská et al., 1991). Regarding actin cytoskeleton reorganization, two  
307 upregulated proteins were identified, namely: the 14-3-3 protein gamma (YWHAG) and the  
308 14-3-3 protein zeta/delta isoform X1 (YWHAZ). The 14-3-3 proteins mediate interactions  
309 between proteins involved in cell-cycle regulation and signal transduction, being important  
310 for protein–protein interactions (Dubois et al., 1997). Therefore, these are adapter proteins  
311 implicated in the regulation of a large spectrum of both specialized and general signalling  
312 pathways. Stress can be defined as a state of threat to homeostasis (Chrousos and Gold, 1992),  
313 and the stress response requires an appropriate coordination of multiple signalling pathways  
314 to return to homeostasis. Therefore, these proteins could be related to the stress response,  
315 although further studies should be performed to clarify their role.

316 The rest of the proteins TMT quantified affect by the stress of shearing were  
317 unmapped in GO terms. The acyl-CoA-binding protein (DBI) and the type II small proline-  
318 rich protein (SPRR2E) were upregulated, whereas CC3; A2M; SCGB1D2; Keratin, Type II

319 Cytoskeletal 6 (KRTL1); and lactoferrin were downregulated in saliva after the stress  
320 response.

321 DBI can act as an intracellular carrier, binding with high affinity to long- and medium-  
322 chain acyl-CoA esters. Furthermore, DBI is able to displace diazepam from its recognition  
323 site located on the acid gamma-aminobutyric (GABA) type A receptor. Therefore, is possible  
324 that DBI module the function of the GABA receptor, acting also as a neuropeptide. (van Aalten  
325 et al., 2001). Acute stressors change the release of different neurotransmitters, such as  
326 acetylcholine or GABA in limbic areas of the brain (e.g., hippocampus, prefrontal cortex,  
327 nucleus accumbens, and amygdala), which are functionally interconnected, leading to the  
328 modulation and promotion of behavioural processes to cope with the stressor (Mora et al.,  
329 2012). Notably, in the present investigation, the SPRR2E cross-linked envelope protein of  
330 keratinocytes. The encoded protein, along with other family members, is a component of the  
331 cornified cell envelope that forms beneath the plasma membrane in terminally differentiated  
332 stratified squamous epithelia. This envelope serves as a barrier against extracellular and  
333 environmental factors. In humans, it has been shown to have a relationship with problem in  
334 skin such as psoriasis (Kainu et al., 2008). In our study, this response could be related with  
335 the stress caused by shearing, which is also skin-related, although further studies should be  
336 made to clarify this fact.

337 The downregulated proteins quantified by TMT in our study were associated with  
338 different acute reactions. CC3 played a central role in the activation of the complement  
339 system in both alternative and classical complement pathways. Derived from the proteolytic  
340 degradation of CC3, CC3a anaphylatoxin is a mediator of local inflammatory processes and  
341 acts as a chemoattractant for neutrophils (Ricklin et al., 2016). In addition, it induces the  
342 contraction of smooth muscle and improves vascular permeability (Ricklin et al., 2016),  
343 increasing the cardiac frequency and vascular permeability needed for an acute stress

344 response. The A2M is a protein that is responsible for the neutralization of proteolytic  
345 enzymes and, in humans, it is considered to be a hyperoxia biomarker (Bhattacharya et al.,  
346 2014). The SCGB1D2 proteins are widely expressed in endocrine-responsive organs. This  
347 protein may bind androgens and other steroids and may be under transcriptional regulation of  
348 steroid hormones (Jackson et al., 2011). The gen KRTL1 encoded a protein that belongs of  
349 the keratin gene family. These proteins, the type II cytokeratins, interfere during  
350 differentiation of simple and stratified epithelial tissues. In general, further studies should be  
351 performed to clarify the role of these downregulated proteins in the stress reactions.

352         Finally, lactoferrin, this secretory glycoprotein is found in body fluids produced by  
353 exocrine glands such as the mammary, salivary, and lacrimal (Lodernnal and Iers, 1995;  
354 Hayashi et al., 2017) and also in neutrophil granules of mammals (Wakabayashi et al., 2006).  
355 Numerous physiological roles have been associated to this protein, including in the protection  
356 against microbial infection, regulation of iron metabolism, and management of immune  
357 functions but also has anti-viral, anti-cancer, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory activities  
358 (Wakabayashi et al., 2006; Hao et al., 2019). In relation to role of the lactoferrin in the ovine  
359 physiology has been evaluated previously in several studies, fundamentally, evaluating the  
360 effects of the lactoferrin bovine milk administration. For example, Wong et al. (1996 and  
361 1998) showed that bovine milk contains several proteins and peptides having  
362 immunomodulatory and/or therapeutic potential effect in sheep. In a recent article, El-Ashker  
363 et al. (2018) suggested that, supplemented with *Lactobacillus* sp., is a possible nutritional  
364 supplements to support the immune system in healthy lambs. Due to its role in the protection  
365 against microbial infection or its anti-viral activities, it also has been administrated as  
366 prebiotic to prevent colonization and excretion *Escherichia Coli* (Yekta et al., 2011) or against  
367 the ovine pulmonary adenomatosis (Sozmen and Beytut, 2012).

368

369 In relation to stress studies, its administration after the application of different  
370 stressors has been associated with an analgesic effect in rodents (Takeuchi et al., 2003;  
371 Zimecki et al., 2005; Tsuchiya et al., 2006). Notably, it seems to exert anxiolytic and  
372 analgesic effects that are accompanied by an increase in nitric oxide production or the  
373 activation of the  $\mu$ -opioid system. Due to its possible attenuation effect in the impact against  
374 stress stimulus, it has also been used in studies as a prebiotic for stress resistance in rodents  
375 (Mika et al., 2016; Peña-Juárez et al., 2016). Maekawa et al. (2017) reported that the  
376 lactoferrin ameliorates corticosterone-related acute stress and hyperglycemia in rats, and its  
377 effect, which could be attributed to the activation of the HPA axis. In a recent report  
378 performed in human, Shinjo et al. (2018) indicated the possible application of lactoferrin in  
379 managing psychological stress being able to exert a suppression effect on the changed in  
380 parasympathetic and sympathetic activities evoked by the calculation task. Therefore, the  
381 pathway of actuation in stress response it could be at both levels (HPA and autonomic  
382 nervous system (SNA)). In any way, lactoferrin appears have an important role in stress  
383 response acting as an adaptogen during stress (Aleshina et al., 2016).

384 However, to our knowledge, no studies have been performed in this specie where has  
385 been evaluated lactoferrin as stress biomarker, furthermore, few studies about this fact there  
386 have being published in veterinary medicine. Kim et al. (2011) found a significant decrease of  
387 lactoferrin in the blood levels of calves after stress due to weaning (around of 30% of its  
388 levels 315 to 216  $\mu\text{g/mL}$  after 1 day post-weaning). In addition, in the only study performed  
389 on saliva in veterinary species, Huang et al. (2017) showed a decrease in saliva lactoferrin  
390 expression of pigs after restraint stress stimulus, although the authors did not observe  
391 significant changes ( $P = 0.06$  after 30 min of immobilization, measured as fold change in  
392 relation to baseline by western blotting). Due to the facts that lactoferrin is one of the most  
393 differently expressed proteins after stress, that it has demonstrated stress-related changes in

394 several other species, and that it can be measured by use of a commercially available  
395 immunoassay in sheep, this protein was selected for the validation study. Our analytical  
396 results showed that immunoassay used is suitable for the application in sheep saliva samples  
397 with an excellent precision, accuracy, and sensitivity. The immunoassay enabled the detection  
398 of a significant stress-induced decrease in lactoferrin levels, around of 27% (0.33 to 0.24  
399  $\mu\text{g/mL}$  post stress). In addition, all sheep showed a decrease in lactoferrin concentrations in  
400 relation to the levels before the stress was applied, showing hardly any overlap.

401 In conclusion, four new metabolic pathways and 13 proteins differentially represented  
402 in the saliva of sheep after an application of acute stress using TMT quantitative proteomic  
403 technique are reported in this study. The new metabolic pathways found include canonical  
404 glycolysis, oxygen transport, neural nucleus development, and regulation of actin  
405 cytoskeleton reorganization. The new stress-related proteins identified in our study with this  
406 high-resolution quantitative proteomic technique could have the potential to be novel  
407 biomarkers of diagnostic or prevention of stress situations, specially lactoferrin, which can be  
408 measured by use of a commercially available immunoassay and which decreased in the sheep  
409 saliva following the application of the stressful stimulus used in our experiment.

410

411

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421

#### 422 **Declaration of interest**

423 The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

424

#### 425 **Ethics statement**

426 In this experiment only were used samples collected before in article Contreras et al.,  
427 (2018) in accordance with the ethical standards of the Bioethical Commission of Murcia  
428 University (CEEA 431/2018).

429

#### 430 **Software and data repository resources**

431 Our data are not deposited in an official repository.

432

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665 Statistically significant expression changes of proteins in saliva of sheep with after model of  
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668 test.  
669

Protein ascension ID	Protein name	Paired t-test (P value)	Mean Before	Mean After	Fold Change
451799070	lactoferrin precursor	0.015	1.465	1.117	-0.39
254656113	Lactoferrin	0.015	1.468	1.128	-0.38
803057661	keratin, type II cytoskeletal 6A	0.015	1.465	1.117	-0.38
803289817	keratin, type II cytoskeletal 6A isoform X2	0.015	1.468	1.128	-0.37
426221202	acyl-CoA-binding protein	0.015	0.625	0.985	0.65
803131482	phosphoglycerate mutase 1	0.015	0.666	1.023	0.61
426253331	phosphoglycerate mutase 1 isoform X1	0.015	0.666	1.023	0.61
803266107	phosphoglycerate mutase 1 isoform X2	0.015	0.666	1.023	0.61
478694	Ig mu chain – sheep	0.015	1.587	1.168	-0.44
803249757	triosephosphate isomerase isoform X2	0.015	0.757	0.917	0.27
965928682	triosephosphate isomerase isoform X1	0.022	0.743	0.892	0.26
803341154	hemoglobin subunit beta isoform X2, partial	0.023	1.145	1.827	0.67
803220086	carcinoma-associated protein 2B isoform X2	0.023	1.490	1.027	-0.53
803055708	alpha-2-macroglobulin isoform X1	0.034	1.062	0.862	-0.30
803055710	alpha-2-macroglobulin isoform X2	0.034	1.062	0.862	-0.30
803055712	alpha-2-macroglobulin isoform X3	0.034	1.062	0.862	-0.30
803055714	alpha-2-macroglobulin isoform X4	0.034	1.062	0.862	-0.30
426219697	major allergen Equ c 1	0.039	1.505	0.955	-0.65
803236637	14-3-3 protein gamma	0.039	0.637	0.871	0.45
803244735	allergen Bos d 2	0.039	1.311	0.985	-0.41
803290165	keratin, type II cytoskeletal 6A, partial	0.039	1.440	1.086	-0.40
803043154	keratin, type II cytoskeletal 6A isoform X1	0.039	1.440	1.086	-0.40
57619320	type II small proline-rich protein	0.039	0.691	0.905	0.38
803205645	small proline-rich protein 2I	0.039	0.691	0.905	0.38
426256638	allergen Bos d 2	0.039	1.275	0.982	-0.37
803055820	calmodulin-alpha	0.039	0.906	1.162	0.35
165945	immunoglobulin mu chain, partial	0.039	1.453	1.157	-0.32
561876	CDS translation of the C_region	0.039	1.453	1.157	-0.32

966012747	Ig mu chain C region secreted form isoform X1	0.039	1.453	1.157	-0.32
803103838	14-3-3 protein zeta/delta isoform X1	0.041	1.388	1.571	0.17
112696	Protein kinase C inhibitor protein 1	0.041	1.376	1.557	0.17
2582411	immunoglobulin alpha heavy chain, partial	0.042	1.972	1.418	-0.47
803205348	complement C3-like	0.042	1.027	0.927	-0.14
426251872	secretoglobin family 1D member	0.049	1.805	1.032	-0.80

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670

671

672 **Figure legends**

673

674 Fig.1. Lactoferrin concentrations in sheep (n = 14) before and after the application of stress  
675 model base on shearing. The plot show median (line within box), 25th and 75th percentiles  
676 (box) and 10th and 90th percentiles (whiskers). Asterisks indicated significant differences  
677 between groups:  $**P < 0.01$ .

678

679 Fig.2. GO terms over-represented in the pool of significantly expressed saliva proteins before  
680 and after stimulus. GO terms are ordered by the number of significant genes/proteins of the  
681 study associated with them according to Gene Ontology database (first y-axis).  $-\log_{10}$  of p-  
682 value for each GO term is represented on the second y-axis. GO terms which define a group  
683 of similar GO terms (determined by ReviGO) are in bold.

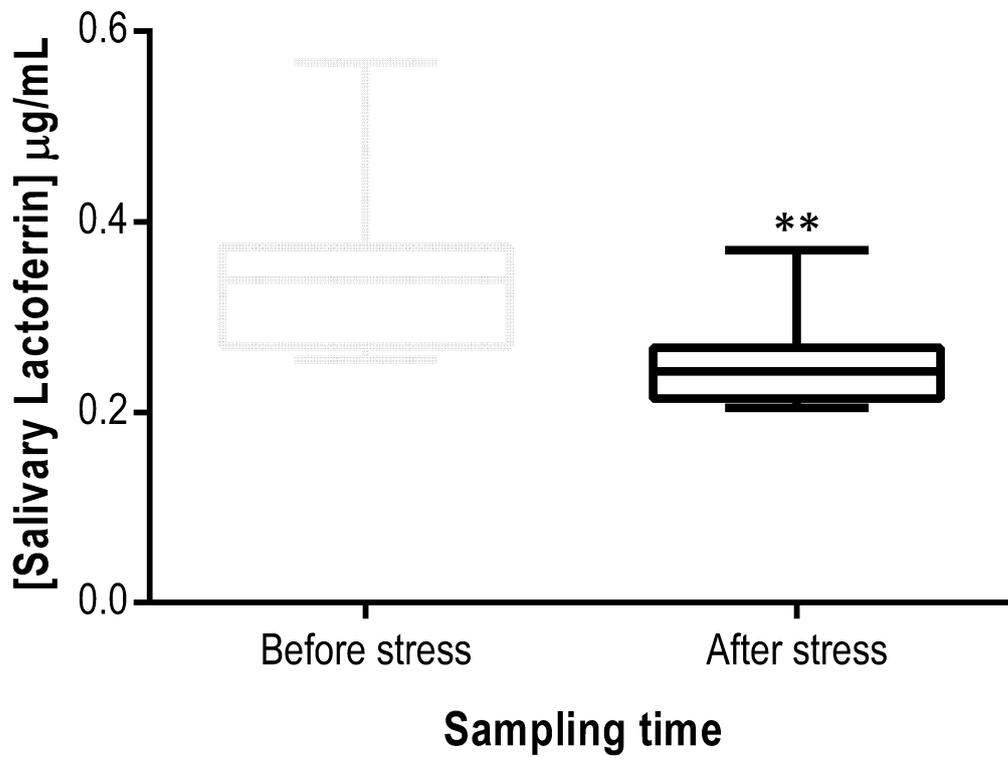
684

685 Fig.3. Network representation of GO terms over-represented in the pool of significant proteins  
686 and associated proteins. GO terms are represented by octagon shape, proteins by diamond  
687 shape. Proteins are in red with a black border for proteins identified in the experiments, or  
688 with a white border for proteins added by the enrichment step. GO nodes are filled by colours  
689 corresponding to their GO group (determined by ReviGO). Name of GO terms defining 1  
690 group are in bold. When a protein belongs to 1 GO term, a link is figured between the nodes  
691 of protein and GO term. The network representation has been realized under Cytoscape using  
692 the radial layout. Acronyms gene and related full name protein of each protein that appears in  
693 the figure (Datas obtained of UniProt data base; (<http://www.uniprot.org>): 1) Mapped original  
694 proteins: CALM2 (Calmodulin-2); HBB (Hemoglobin subunit beta); PGAM1  
695 (Phosphoglycerate mutase 1); TPI1 (Triosephosphate isomerase), YWHAG (14-3-3 protein  
696 gamma) and YWHAZ (14-3-3 protein zeta/delta). 2) Mapped enriched proteins: ACTR1A

697 (Alpha-actinin); ALDOA (Fructose-bisphosphate aldolase A); ALDO B (Fructose-  
698 bisphosphate aldolase B); ALDO C (Fructose-bisphosphate aldolase C); CLU (Clusterin);  
699 ENO1 (Alpha-enolase); ENO2 (Gamma-enolase); ENO3 (Beta-enolase); GAPDH  
700 (Glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase); GAPDHS (Glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate  
701 dehydrogenase, testis-specific); HBA1 (Hemoglobin subunit alpha-1); HBA2 (Hemoglobin  
702 subunit alpha-2); HBD (Hemoglobin subunit delta); HBE1 (Hemoglobin subunit epsilon);  
703 OPTN (Optineurin); PGK1 (PGK1); RAB10 (Ras-related protein Rab-10); RAPGEF3 (Rap  
704 guanine nucleotide exchange factor 3); RAPGEF4 (Rap guanine nucleotide exchange factor  
705 4) and YWHAQ (14-3-3 protein theta). 3) Unmapped original proteins: A2M (Alpha-2-  
706 macroglobulin); C3 (Complement C3); DBI (Acyl CoA-binding protein); KRT6B (Keratin,  
707 type II cytoskeletal 6B); LTF (Lactoferrin); SCGB1D2 (Secretoglobin family 1D member 2)  
708 and SPRR2E (Small proline rich protein 2E). 4) Unmapped enriched proteins: A1BG (Alpha-  
709 1B-glycoprotein); AKAP9 (A-kinase anchor protein 9); APCS (Serum amyloid P-  
710 component); APP (Amyloid precursor protein); CDKN1B (Cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor  
711 1B); CXCL13 (C-X-C motif chemokine 13); CXCR6 (C-X-C chemokine receptor type 6);  
712 FAM3C (Protein FAM3C); GNB5 (Guanine nucleotide-binding protein subunit beta-5);  
713 HSPG2 (Basement membrane-specific heparan sulfate proteoglycan core protein); INSL5  
714 (Insulin-like peptide INSL5); MAFF (Transcription factor MafF); MAGED2 (Melanoma-  
715 associated antigen D2); NMUR1 (Neuromedin-U receptor 1); PGK2 (Phosphoglycerate  
716 kinase 2); TUBB4A (Tubulin beta-4A chain) and VTI1B (Vesicle transport through  
717 interaction with t-SNAREs homolog 1B).

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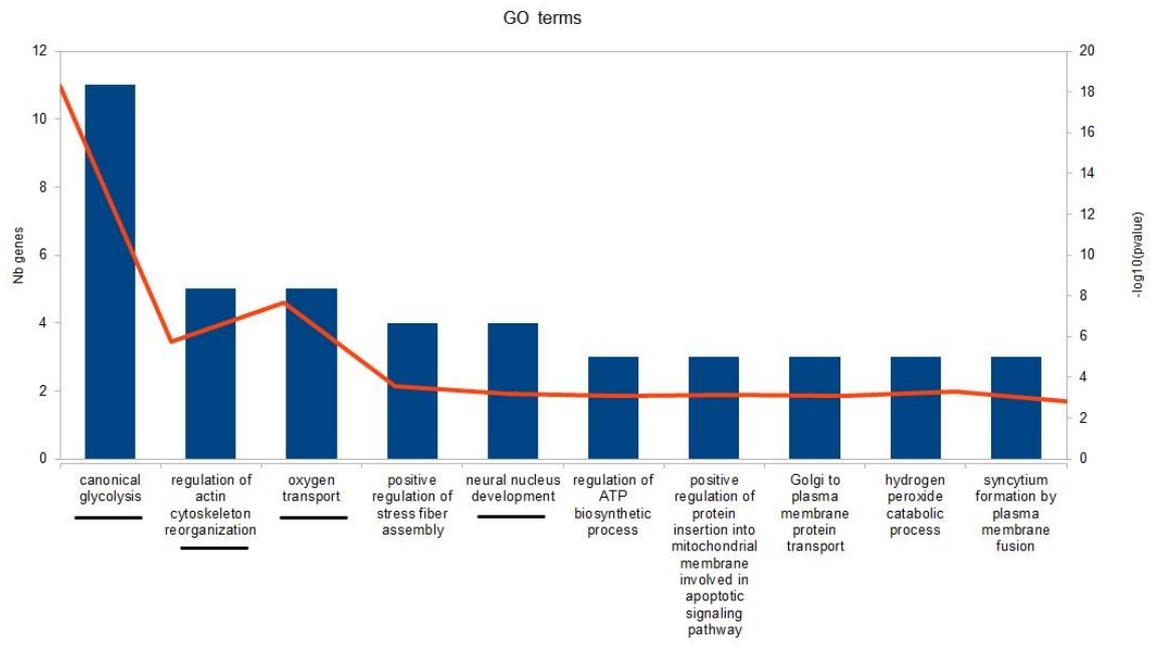
719 Figure 1



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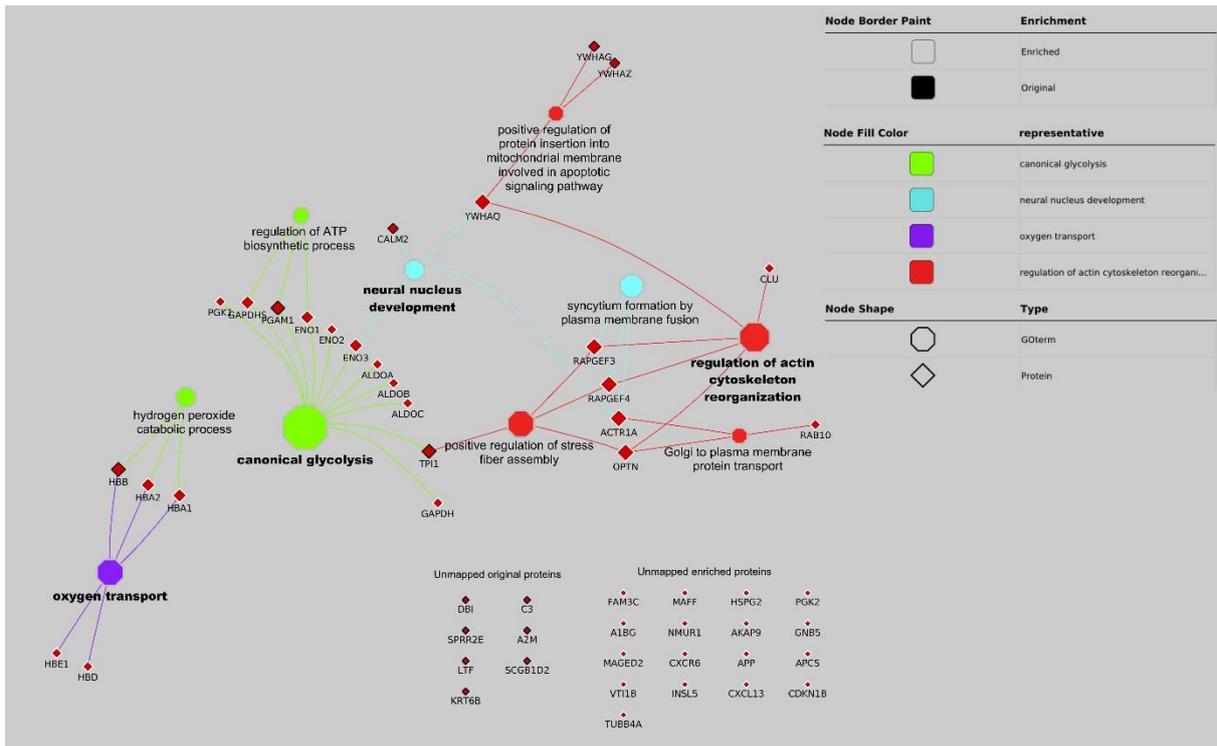
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722 Figure 2



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