

Planning Dairy Animal Well-Being

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References:

Caring for Compromised Cattle
http://www.aabp.org/bmp_task_force/Transportation/Compromised%20Cattle%202010FINAL.pdf

Dairy Animal Care Quality Assurance
<http://www.bqa.org/CMDocs/bqa/DairyBQAManual.pdf>

National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative-Principles for Dairy Animal Well-Being
<http://www.dairywellbeing.org/pdfs/NDAWI%20Principles%20&%20Guidelines.pdf>

UC Davis Veterinary Medicine Animal Welfare
http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vetext/programs/animal_welfare/dairy_cattle.cfm

National Farm Animal Care Council-Canada
www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice



Image source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dcvsurfer/49889259522>

The American Veterinary Medical Association defines an animal in a good state of welfare (as indicated by scientific evidence) when it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behavior and not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. Ignorance or lack of skills regarding the care of cattle, economic hardship, and apathy or laziness may result in unmet animal welfare. Illness or injury on the part of the animal caretaker, and lack of supervision during a short-term absence may lead to animal care issues. Cultural or societal factors and environmental disasters may lead to failure to provide adequate care.

Health Plans

Our approach to dairy well-being begins with maintaining the health of the animals in our care. In 2008 the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative Principles & Guidelines for Dairy Animal Well-Being set forth its guiding principle, stating "the health of all animals and animal groups should be maintained through preventative care programs augmented by rapid diagnosis and treatment when necessary."

The valid veterinary-client-patient-relationship (VCPR) is paramount for proper and appropriate diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of dairy health issues. Farms must maintain a current

herd health plan which includes management protocols for painful procedures and conditions and protocols for special needs cattle and compromised cattle. Appropriate euthanasia guidelines and training for designated and assigned personnel must also be included in herd health plans.

A herd health plan should include animal diagnosis, treatment, and prevention training for new employees plus refresher training for existing employees. Standard operating procedures need to be developed, reviewed annually and revised as necessary, with management oversight responsibilities delegated. Emergency management plans must be developed for all risk areas of the farm. A record keeping system must be developed and used.

Plans are not to be written and then placed in a drawer. To promote animal well-being animal caretakers should be adequately trained, follow protocols, and have access to record systems to meet the requirements of their position.

Developing Animal Care Plans

Assess your resources as you develop your animal care plan. Learn about risk areas on your farm in order to determine how to overcome or mitigate potential risks as well as develop contingency plans. Potential risk areas are associated with veterinary care and herd health management programs, health conditions around calving, grouping and animal movement, lameness, mastitis, calves, and sick, injured and cull animals. Extreme weather conditions pose risks to our animal care plans. Employees (their training and supervision, and the time they have devoted to their tasks) also factor in as risks to your animal care plans.

Many programs are available to help frame your farm specific animal care plan. As Beef Quality Assurance (BQA, www.bqa.org) concepts matured during the 1990's, dairy producing states began to implement Dairy BQA. Working together in 2009, the National BQA Program and National Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA) adopted, streamlined, and launched Dairy Animal Care Quality Assurance (DACQA) as a voluntary national program for dairy producers. The DACQA Manual can be found at dairybeef@dhia.org. While administered by the WI Beef Council, UW-Extension trained agents can also provide Dairy-BQA Certification. Visit the WI Beef Information Center, <http://fyi.uwex.edu/wbic/quality-assurance/> for program and contact information.

The Animal Care Training (ACT) program, www.animalcaretraining.org, serves as an online training site for beef, dairy, equine, transportation, and livestock marketers. Web-based audiovisual training modules in English and Spanish featuring topics such as animal husbandry, animal welfare, environmental stewardship and food safety practices are located on this site. DACQA modules can also be accessed on this site. Check with your Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Inc. representative for promotional access to the site, which is a \$25 to \$50 value per person.

The National Dairy FARM Program is a nation-wide, verifiable program that addresses animal well-being. Third-party verification ensures the validity and the integrity of the program to consumers. Information regarding the National Dairy FARM Program and training modules in both English and Spanish are available at www.nationaldairyfarm.com. Producers can participate independently or through their cooperative or processor. Producers who are affiliated with a cooperative or proprietary processor should contact their representative to see if their milk marketing organization is participating in the program. UW-Extension also has certified FARM evaluators. Contact dairyfarm@nmpf.org for evaluator contact information.

UW-Extension Dairy Workers' Skills Trainings features six separate modules covering skills related to milking, reproduction, calf management, herdsman'ship, feeding and nutrition, and handling skills. Useful for employee trainings, these modules are available for purchase at <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/>.

Additional Farm Owner Responsibilities

Dairy farm owners must have an expectation of complete, comprehensive animal care 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Daily supervision of employees should be part of every operation, along with training and retraining to ensure this expectation is met. Employee manuals outlining expectations allow for success. Employee reference checks are critical as is developing an atmosphere of trust which encourages employees to report bad behavior.

Employees thrive when clarity, discipline, and accountability are followed. Job descriptions, written protocols and SOPs, and policies must be clearly stated and gone over with the employee at hire. Request the employee signing off his/her understanding of them. Demonstrate procedures, follow through and follow up; set good examples with your own animal care. Evaluate employees and hold everyone responsible when expectations are not met.

Farmers have a duty to protect their farm, and as such should control visitors and access to farms. Unauthorized personal are a biosecurity risk and represent a safety liability for the farm.

When Plans Fall Short

Think through the farm's internal response when employees fail to comply with animal care plans. How will the employee be reprimanded? When does failure to comply prompt termination? Is the employee better suited to other duties on the farm? Have resources available for employee training and retraining.

How will you respond when a charge of inappropriate animal care is leveled against your farm? Even as you use current best management practices and procedures on your farm, expect to justify them to the public. During this technologic era, perception is reality and people are considered guilty until proven innocent. Farmers are part of the 0.3% of the entire population who understands modern agriculture; which leaves the vast majority not speaking the same terminology as you, and not understanding husbandry concepts. You cannot discredit the public's right to know. You can embrace their desire to know and take the opportunity to educate before a perceived incident puts you on the defense.

Work cooperatively with enforcement authorities. Identify the incident, gathering and documenting information as you assess the situation with your veterinarian. Be clear and concise with your verbal and written response. Avoid using agriculture jargon, keep your composure and remember that nothing is off the record. Designate one media spokesperson for your farm. Be proactive in planning for this response by preparing your spokesperson. Many agricultural organizations now offer media trainings.

Be transparent and forthcoming during the investigation. Show your farms' documentation related to animal well-being including treatment and cull records, euthanasia plan and records, and animal care protocols. Be proud of the good work your farm is doing with its animal care.

In Summary:

Work with your veterinarian, county UW-Extension agent, and other farm consultants to develop a dairy animal well-being plan specific for your farm. Doing so demonstrates your commitment to quality animal care.