

Executive Summary

The ethical obligations associated with dairy production include a strong emphasis on animal well-being. As science and practical experience enhance our understanding of dairy animal well-being, producers continue to employ appropriate animal care and management practices. The National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative has developed broad principles and guidelines that dairy animal well-being programs should include to meet our ethical obligations. These principles and guidelines are summarized here and expanded in the remainder of this document. All dairy animal well-being programs should be consistent with the principles and guidelines of the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative.

Nutrition

Guiding Principle: Animals and animal groups should have access to a nutritionally adequate diet and clean, fresh water.

Guideline for Newborn Calves: All calves should receive colostrum or colostrum replacer and be fed in a way that promotes health and reduces the risk of disease.

Guideline for Weaned Calves and Growing Cattle: Weaned calves and growing heifers should receive adequate nutrition and water to achieve a proper body condition score and be fed in a way that promotes health and reduces the risk of disease.

Guideline for Adult Cattle: All cattle should receive adequate nutrition and water to achieve a proper body condition score and be fed in a way that promotes health and reduces the risk of disease.

Animal Health

Guiding Principle: The health of all animals and animal groups should be maintained through preventive care programs augmented by rapid diagnosis and treatment when necessary.

Guidelines: Dairy operations should have:

- A valid Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)
- A current herd health plan
- Management protocols for painful procedures and conditions
- Management protocols for special needs cattle – cattle with a physical or medical condition that requires additional care and/or monitoring
- Appropriate euthanasia guidelines and training for designated and assigned personnel

Management

Guiding Principle: 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.

Guidelines: The operation should have a herd health plan as well as training and protocols for handling, transporting and caring, and euthanasia for cattle for all ages and health conditions. The plan should include:

- Training for new employees plus refresher training for existing employees
- Standard operating procedures to be reviewed annually and revised as necessary
- An emergency management plan
- Record keeping system
- Management oversight responsibilities
- Protocol for special needs cattle

Housing and Facilities

Guiding Principle: Facilities should be designed, constructed and maintained to provide and promote animal health, comfort and safety.

Guidelines for Calves (Birth to Weaning or Sale) and Young Stock (Weaning to Parturition or Sale): Calves and young stock should be given space to stand, lie down, and turn around without difficulty, provided an environment that is clean and dry and be protected from seasonal weather extremes.

Guidelines for Adult Cattle: Adult cattle should be given space to stand and lie down, be provided an environment that is clean and dry and be protected from seasonal weather extremes. Facilities should be designed, constructed and maintained to reduce the risk of injury and the development of leg lesions.

Handling, Movement, and Transportation

Guiding Principle: All animals and animal groups should be handled, moved and transported in a manner that reduces the risk of the potential for injury, discomfort or disease.

Guideline: Facilities should be designed and maintained so animals can be moved in a manner that reduces the risk of slips, falls and collisions. Employees should be trained to follow appropriate handling, movement and transportation protocols.

Third Party Verification

Guiding Principle:

Assuring on-farm dairy animal well-being requires third party verification.

Guideline:

All dairy animal well-being programs should include third party verification to assure the program is able to demonstrate our commitment to meeting our ethical obligation to provide for the well-being of animals in the U.S. dairy industry.