

# **National Dairy Animal Well-Being** Initiative

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## **Producer-Led Coalition Proposes National Umbrella of Dairy Animal Well-Being Principles and Guidelines**

*Program to validate existing animal well-being programs; protect consumer trust and confidence in dairy industry*

MADISON, Wis. (Oct. 4, 2007) – A producer-led coalition representing every facet of the dairy industry today announced the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative, an effort to protect consumer trust and confidence in the dairy industry’s commitment to animal well-being. The coalition introduced the first draft of proposed principles and guidelines intended to provide a uniform umbrella of assurance that the industry is meeting its ethical obligation for dairy animal well-being.

According to Joan Behr, director of communications and employee development, Foremost Farms USA, the goal of the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative is to provide assurance to stakeholders that the dairy industry is meeting its obligation to provide appropriate care for its animals.

“We know there is a growing disconnect between consumers and today’s dairy producers,” Behr said. “This initiative was developed to protect the high level of trust our industry currently has with consumers by actively demonstrating that we are doing the right thing when it comes to the well-being of our animals.”

Behr stressed that today’s announcement marked the beginning of the coalition’s work. Throughout the next nine months, dairy producers will have an opportunity to review the draft principles and guidelines and provide input through their co-op or industry association. The coalition will incorporate industry feedback into the final principles and guidelines. Behr expects the entire process will take approximately 12 months.

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The work of the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative has already been endorsed by co-ops representing more than 25,236 farms and more than 104.1 billion pounds of milk marketed annually. This represents approximately 57 percent of the milk marketed in the United States annually, based on current statistics from USDA.

### **Principles and Guidelines to Validate Existing Well-Being Programs**

Dr. M. Gatz Riddell, Jr., executive vice president of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, says that once the principles and guidelines are finalized, they will help ensure that individual dairy animal well-being programs offered by cooperatives, processors or independent companies provide a consistent level of dairy animal well-being assurance.

“This is not another on-farm well-being program,” Dr. Riddell said. “With this initiative, we’re seeking to provide principles and guidelines that can provide validation to the various programs that already exist and help the industry demonstrate our commitment to animal well-being across the country.”

One of the principles is third party oversight, which will verify the credibility of on-farm well-being programs. Cooperatives, processors or independent companies may incorporate different methods of oversight to verify that the principles and guidelines are being followed on individual operations.

### **For Producers, Initiative to Help Protect Markets**

For Deb Reinhart, owner and operator of Gold Star Farms in New Holstein, Wis., the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative benefits producers because it will help them protect market access.

“This initiative will help us, as producers, control our own destiny by preserving the market access we currently enjoy,” Reinhart said. “Even though we have a strong tradition of providing good care for our animals, this will validate that we are meeting our ethical obligation and the expectations of our customers and consumers.”

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The National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative is a producer-led program designed to protect the trust and confidence that consumers have in the dairy industry. Participants include volunteers representing every facet of the dairy industry. For more information and to view the current draft principles and guidelines, go to [www.dairywellbeing.org](http://www.dairywellbeing.org).