



Dairy Facts: Animal Health & Welfare

Dairy Producers Have an Economic Incentive to Provide Proper Care – Healthy Cows Produce More, Higher-Quality Milk

TAD and Its members are proud to be part of initiatives that demonstrate the industry's commitment to animal well-being

- The National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative (www.dairywellbeing.org) – a producer-led coalition that aims to protect consumer trust and confidence in the dairy industry through its principles and guidelines that provide a uniform umbrella of assurance that the industry is meeting its ethical obligation for dairy animal well-being.
- The National Dairy FARM (Farmers Assuring Responsible Management) Program (www.nationaldairyfarm.com) – a nationwide program, verified by third parties, that addresses animal well-being by bringing consistency and uniformity to on-farm care and providing reassurance to consumers.

Animal abuse is unacceptable to the Texas Association of Dairymen and its members

- TAD and its dairy producer members are outraged by inhumane treatment of animals, whether on or off the farm.
- TAD supports government investigations into any allegations of animal abuse. If such allegations are proven, violators should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Food and shelter

- Access to feed and fresh, clean water 24 hours a day.
- A balanced, nutritious, scientifically formulated diet – including silage or pasture, grains, protein sources, vitamins and minerals – developed by a nutritionist.
- Comfortable housing in barns that are cleaned daily and use ventilation and water-distribution systems to maintain temperature controls in extreme hot or cold weather.
- Sanitary living conditions with fresh bedding provided frequently.
- In some cases, options such as sand bedding or customized flooring ensure cow comfort.
- At many dairy farms, “free-stall” barns allow cows to eat, drink and sleep whenever and wherever they choose.
- In the pasture, cows have access to shade and shelter as needed.

Health and medical attention

- Regular medical care directed and monitored by a veterinarian, including periodic check-ups, vaccinations and prompt treatment of illness.
- A cow treated with antibiotics is separated from the milking herd and placed in a separate area so her milk does not enter the food supply. She is not returned to the herd until the antibiotics have cleared her system.
- All milk is strictly tested for antibiotics on the farm and at the processing plant. Any milk that tests positive for antibiotics is disposed of immediately and does not enter the food supply. In such cases, the farmer responsible for the milk is required to pay for the full tanker of milk.

Care starts before the calf is born

- Just prior to giving birth, the pregnant cow is housed in a special pen or area and given individual care and attention.

(over)

- A close eye is kept on both cow and calf during calving to ensure the health of both – dairy farmers, farm employees or veterinarians are available to help.
- Comfortable, safe and clean conditions are provided for both cow and calf during and after the birthing process.
- Farmers bottle-feed calves individually to ensure they are protected against disease and receive good nutrition.
- Calves and cows are usually separated within 24 hours of birth to protect the health of the calf. Moving the vulnerable newborn calf to a clean environment such as a calf hutch also helps prevent disease

Understanding tail docking and dehorning

Tail Docking

- Some dairy farmers crop the tails of their animals to promote cleanliness, similar to what people do to some breeds of dogs.
- Switch trimming – the removal of the hair at the end of the tail – is the preferred alternative to docking for hygiene purposes.
- Tail docking has limited impact on the animal’s comfort and no negative impact on the safety or quality of milk.

Dehorning

- Dehorning is a practice used for decades to reduce the risk of injury to cows and their handlers.
- When possible, dehorning is performed at an early age. This “disbudding” of non-developed horn buds is a fairly simple procedure that doesn’t require anesthesia.
- For a cow with developed horns, dairy farmers and veterinarians, using best industry practices, will ensure the comfort and safety of an animal through sedation or anesthesia.

What happens when an animal becomes disabled?

- A very small percent of dairy cows become permanently disabled – it is important to note that just because an animal is nonambulatory, it does not mean it is fatally diseased or permanently disabled.
- An animal that becomes permanently disabled is humanely euthanized and does not enter the human food supply.
- Nonambulatory animals are not sent to market.
- Dairy farmers support government regulations that prohibit nonambulatory cattle from entering the food supply.

The Texas Association of Dairymen (www.milk4texas.org) is a non-profit corporation comprised of dairy cooperatives whose members are individual milk producers in Texas.