

Animal Care on Dairy Farms

A cow's health is of the utmost importance to dairy farmers, because proper animal care leads to the production of high-quality milk. Nutritious diets, clean living conditions and good medical care are all essential for healthy cows, these are among the many animal welfare practices routinely used by dairy farmers. This is true no matter the size of the farm.



The dairy industry has in place a number of initiatives that demonstrate our commitment to animal well-being. The National Dairy FARM (Farmers Assuring Responsible Management) program (www.nationaldairyfarm.com), is a verifiable animal well-being program that brings consistency and uniformity to on-farm animal care and production practices. Currently, the FARM program represents 98% of the nation's milk supply. The dairy community has a proven track record of responsible management practices. FARM creates a culture of continuous improvement every day. Animal scientists and dairy farmers continually explore ways to improve the comfort of dairy cows. Typical practices on modern farms include:

SHELTER

- Most dairy cows are raised in barns so farmers can control the environment in which they live. The barns provide protection from weather, allow the farmers to ensure the cows are eating a balanced diet and provide protection from possible predators.
- Many dairy farms in Ohio and West Virginia use "free-stall" housing, a type of barn that allows cows the freedom to move about at will and eat and sleep whenever they choose. In this housing configuration, feed for the animals is available which cows can access 24 hours a day. Dairy cows always have access to clean water.
- Cows need to lie down or rest 12-14 hours a day. Cows may sleep in sand stalls or on mattresses filled with rubber, foam, or a combination of materials straw, sawdust, sand or another bedding material covering the mattress.
- Most dairy barns have advanced ventilation systems to assure air quality. On warm days, farmers use fans and some use water misters to keep cows cool and comfortable. On cold days the curtains and doors can be closed to keep the cold wind off the cows.
- Access to pasture is determined mainly by geography, herd size, availability of land suitable for grazing, and weather conditions.
- In all cases, the wellbeing, protection and comfort of their cows are very important concerns for dairy farmers.



FEEDING

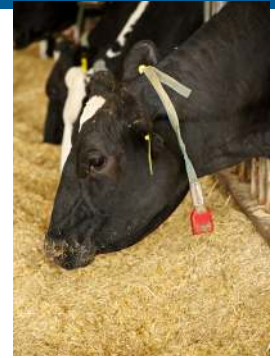
- Farmers often employ professional dairy nutritionists to develop scientifically formulated, balanced, and nutritious diets for their cows, known as a Total Mixed Ration (TMR). A typical TMR diet may include hay and hay silage, corn silage, or other available forages, grains, protein sources (such as soy) and other vitamins and minerals.
- A cow has one stomach but four compartments; the first three compartments process feed in a way that people cannot. Because of this unique digestive system,



cows have the ability to convert agricultural by-products, such as distillers grain (a byproduct of brewing), that humans cannot eat into nutritious foods like milk.

HEALTH AND MEDICAL ATTENTION

- Cows receive regular veterinary care, including periodic check-ups, preventative vaccinations and prompt treatment of illness.
- It is important to note that dairy cows are not routinely treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics are only used when a cow is sick. When illness requires that cows be treated, antibiotics are administered according strict FDA guidelines, which include withholding milk from treated cows so that it never leaves the farm and cannot be sold or used for food for people. When a cow's milk is withheld, she is given special care and attention separate from the rest of milking herd until her milk is once again free of antibiotics.
- Farmers keep records to help ensure the responsible use of antibiotics. These efforts help farmers and farm employees keep up-to-date information about each animal, including treatment date, dosage, which workers administers the medicine, treatment duration and withdrawal times for milk.
- All milk is strictly tested for antibiotics. Any milk that tests positive is disposed of immediately and does not get into the food supply. If milk arrives at the processing plant and tests positive for antibiotics, the farmer who sold that milk is required to pay for the full tanker of milk.



TAIL DOCKING

- The dairy industry has phased out the practice of routine tail docking, after hearing concerns from consumers.
- The National Dairy FARM program endorses switch trimming, which is removal of the hair at the end of the cow's tail for hygiene purposes.

DEHORNING/DISBUDDING

- Cows' horns are a safety concern to humans as well as other cows. Dehorning is a practice used for decades to help reduce the risk of injury to cows and animal 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, best industry practices will ensure the comfort and safety of an animal through sedation or anesthesia.

CALF CARE

- Cows produce milk once they deliver a calf. They typically give birth to a calf every 12 months. For two to three months before giving birth, the cow rests and does not give milk.
- Prior to giving birth, the pregnant cow is placed in a clean, dry, well-lit, and well-ventilated separate calving area to ensure comfortable, safe and hygienic conditions for both mother and calf.
- Newborn calves are born with a suppressed immune system. Shortly after birth they are taken to a clean, individual pen where they are monitored and provided milk to help them grow.
- After giving birth the cow rejoins the milking herd. She is watched carefully for the first few weeks to ensure she is healthy.
- Another way farmers ensure the health of their calves is by feeding newborns two to four quarts of colostrum—the first milk the mother produces after giving birth. This special milk is usually delivered by bottle. Colostrum is high in fat and protein and contains antibodies that help build the calf's immune system.