

NORTHWEST VETS NEWSLETTER

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National Dairy FARM Program

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On January 26th, ABC Nightline presented a story on the dairy industry. Willet Dairy (NY) was the subject of animal activists posing as employees and videotaping various practices including tail docking and dehorning. The video can be seen on the ABC website and another longer uncut video on a website called www.mercyforanimals.com. I think it is good idea for all of us to know the good and bad publicity on the dairy industry. Groups like PETA and HSUS have a lot of money and time to put this video and narration together and use it to obtain more support and money for their organizations. We cannot bury our heads and just say, "They don't understand what is going on" and assume this will all go away. I, by no means condone abuse and mishandling of animals. But on the other hand, to hear PETA call artificial insemination abusive to cattle because we are forcing cattle to be pregnant only shows me that we have not educated the public about the production of milk. So why not be part of the solution, be proactive!

In January 2009 the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) and Dairy Management Inc. (DMI) announced the introduction of the National Dairy FARM Program: Farmers Assuring Responsible Management. The FARM program has an animal care manual and user guide that contains a guideline for a national on-farm animal well-being program. According to the NMPF, the development of the animal care manual is to "bolster consumer trust and confidence in the U.S. dairy industry and demonstrate the industry's commitment to the highest levels of animal care and quality assurance". Voluntary and available to all producers, the program includes education, on-farm evaluations, and third party verification to ensure the validity and integrity of the program.

The sections that the animal care manual covers are:

Management (standard operating procedures, training and record keeping)

Newborn calves

Nutrition

Animal health

Environment and facilities

Handling, movement and transportation

Special needs animals

In each section or chapter there is a short (1 to 3 paragraph) section about the topic and a series of questions that a person can answer yes, no or don't know.

One example of set questions from the user's guide section on environment and facilities is:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Clean, dry, well-lit, well-ventilated calving area is used.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Calves are housed in a clean, dry area with adequate space to stand, lie down, and turn around without difficulty | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Calves are protected from extreme temperatures, wind drafts, and precipitation during seasonal weather extremes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

The last chapter of the manual is on third-party verification. The person is asked if they wish to participate in third party verification, i.e., third-party verification is not necessary to go through the animal care manual.

As of November 2009 dairy producers have online access to the Animal Care Manual and Animal Care Quick Reference User Guide at www.nationaldairyfarm.com. On farm evaluations are starting now and, if you chose, third-party verifications should be available in 2011.

Last month, I emailed the people at the national dairy farm website about starting a client in the program. Their response was to use the manual and user guide as a self-assessment tool. At the moment this is the only material available, although a DVD with the same information as the manual and user guide is being created. They are developing training materials for on-farm evaluators who will be going on to farms to ask a series of questions and submit information to the National Dairy FARM program. Veterinarians will be able to take the training late spring early summer to become an on-farm evaluator for the program.

I strongly encourage our clients to take a proactive stand on this issue. To “blow this off” just gives groups like PETA and HSUS more ammunition to make the dairy industry look like ignorant thugs and not as intelligent and hard working individuals. Personally, I hope we can advertise to the public that our producers are participating in programs like this to ensure a healthy and safe food product.

“The rule to be observed in this stable at all times, toward the cattle, young and old, is that of patience and kindness. A man’s usefulness in a herd ceases at once when he loses his temper and bestows rough usage. Men must be patient. Cattle are not reasoning beings. Remember that this is the Home of Mothers. Treat each cow as a Mother should be treated. The giving of milk is a function of Motherhood: rough treatment lessens the flow. That injures me as well as the cow. Always keep these ideas in mind in dealing with my cattle.” W.D. Hoard, 1885 (Hoard’s Dairyman)