

Northwest Veterinary Associates, Inc.
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“A righteous man cares for the needs of his animals” Proverbs 12:10

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If you have been reading current dairy magazines in recent months, you have seen that animal husbandry issues have been a common topic. In some cases, truly abusive situations have come under public scrutiny. In other cases, common and legitimate management practices have been misunderstood by the consuming public. This increased concern for animal care on dairy farms should encourage us to consider how we handle our cattle from birth to death.

The “60 Minutes” test is often proposed as a good measure for our animal care. This suggests that if a reporter from 60 Minutes followed us throughout our day of treating and handling cows, our husbandry should be able to pass muster. Unfortunately, many of our legitimate procedures might appear distasteful. For example, stabbing a 12 ga. needle in the neck of a sick cow might turn the stomach of a suburban mother. Or carefully moving an injured downer with a skid-steer bucket might appear as gross mis-treatment by an uninformed urban person. Simply separating a newborn calf from its mother is considered terrible abuse by a growing segment of our society.

On the other hand, most of us are guilty at some time in our lives of handling animals in ways that we are not particularly proud of. And as farms increase in size, it is common for the owner/manager to not be involved in the daily caring and handling of his livestock. These jobs are frequently assigned to hired labor.

So in this confusing environment of consumer activism in animal welfare, it behooves us to examine our role in providing humane care to the animals we have been entrusted to look after. These are not simple issues to face, but unless we begin to confront these concerns from consumers, it is entirely possible, even likely, that we will be facing increased scrutiny and restrictions. Some of the management areas that you might evaluate on your farming operation include:

- **Pain Management**-Animals that have painful conditions or have painful procedures done to them need pain management. This

includes dehorning older heifers, trimming feet with painful problems, difficult calvings, etc.

- **Downer cow management-** Cows that are down need aggressive and daily care, which includes fresh feed and water, daily milking, clean bedding, and a soft surface to prevent further injury to muscles and joints.
- **Lame cow management-** Cows with painful foot problems require special care. First, they need to be promptly examined and treated for the condition causing the lameness. Secondly, they may need to be removed from the main herd and managed on a “lame pack” or a “special needs” group. Hopelessly lame animals should be either sent to market or humanely euthanized on the farm.
- **Housing and sanitation-**More and more consumers are concerned about how we house and care for our dairy livestock. **Clean, dry and comfortable** are the standards we should demand for the animals in our care. Gross manure contamination, inadequate bedding or resting areas, slippery floor surfaces, and poor ventilation systems are examples of sub-standard care.
- **Sick animal management and treatment-** Cows that have diseases or conditions, which we can treat or improve, need to be treated. Prompt intervention is important. If it is delayed, the animal suffers and the outcome is often less satisfactory.
- **Animal handling-** When animals are moved, sorted, and treated, it needs to be done gently and by experienced workers.
- **Carcass disposal-** Animals that die on the farm must be disposed of promptly and properly. Vermont state law requires composting or burial away from waterways and aquifers.

RESIDUE ALERT!

Nearly 77% of all drug residues found in beef at slaughter are in cull dairy cows. Penicillin is the drug most commonly found, followed closely by flunixin (Banamine and its generic equivalents). In many cases, this is due to lack of understanding of the importance of dose and route of administration in determining withholding time. Flunixin is labeled for IV use because its bioavailability is much greater when given by that route, and because when given IM it causes severe tissue damage and prolonged tissue residues. Modern dosages for penicillin are much higher than the dose indicated on the bottle label. Consequently, withholding times must be longer. This is why a veterinarian’s label must be applied to penicillin, which is otherwise approved for OTC (over-the-counter) sale.