Our Commitment

U.S. dairy farmers and dairy companies have a strong track record of treating cows with respect, which means providing a nutritious diet, good medical care and healthy living conditions. The long legacy of animal care and relationships with veterinarians and animal nutritionists gives dairy farmers the knowledge and tools they need to ensure our milk supply is healthy, safe and wholesome. The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy demonstrates its commitment to animal care through strong support of The National Dairy FARM Program: Farmers Assuring Responsible Management™ (FARM), which provides best practices in animal care and quality assurance in the dairy industry.

Created in 2009, the FARM Animal Care Program strives to assure consumers and customers that dairy farmers raise and care for their animals and land in a humane and ethical manner. The program, comprising dairy farmers, cooperatives and processors across the U.S., holds its members to rigorous guidelines that ensure the utmost quality on our nation’s dairy farmers. Currently, over 98 percent of the domestic milk supply in 49 states comes from farms that participate in the FARM Animal Care Program, which fosters a culture of continuous improvement toward positive change.
Supporting Key Efforts

The FARM Animal Care Program guidelines around responsible operating procedures for dairy farms include appropriate care for cows and calves, clean environment and housing, hands-on employee training, record-keeping on individual animals and working with veterinarians and other animal care professionals. The three “Priority One” areas that farms are required to meet to be in good standing with the program include a completed and signed veterinarian-client-patient-relationship form on an annual basis, basic stockmanship training and other necessary training for all employees and eliminating the practice of routine tail docking of dairy animals. “Priority Two” requirements include animal observation benchmarks and a written Herd Health Plan for dealing with newborn and milk-fed dairy calves, pain management, training for non-ambulatory animal management and euthanasia.

The program takes a three-pronged approach to ensuring compliance:

1. **Guidelines and Training:** Updated every three years by an advisory group of experts, the FARM Animal Care Reference Manual details guidelines for every calf and cow. The manual and supplementary materials outline the best standards for animal care from birth to end of life, facilities and housing, nutrition, equipment and milking procedures, transportation and animal handling.

2. **On-Farm Evaluations:** Farmers are evaluated at least once every three years by experts. There are currently over 370 certified FARM Animal Care Program evaluators who have conducted over 45,000 assessments over the past 8 years. Evaluations provide feedback to farmers about areas in which they are excelling, as well as those where improvement is needed.

3. **Verification:** When the dairy industry says it’s taking great care of its animals, third-party verification ensures its integrity by measuring its standards with outside experts, who provide statistically verified data on the industry’s animal care. The results are published each year in The National Dairy FARM Program’s “Year in Review” report.

If an evaluation identifies a need for improvement, then a mandatory corrective action plan for Priority One areas or a continuous improvement plan for Priority Two areas will be developed in consultation with dairy professionals. Once an action plan is created, it must be resolved and verified by a follow-up evaluation within 12 months for a mandatory corrective action plan, and before the next evaluation or sooner for continuous improvement plans. If a Priority One area is not resolved within 12 months, the farm will risk probation and eventual suspension from the FARM Animal Care Program.

Getting Involved

Innovation Center board companies support the National Dairy FARM Animal Care Program. To learn more please visit nationaldairyfarm.com/animalcare.