Dairy cattle on-farm quality assurance in the United States

Jamie Jonker1, Emily Yeiser Stepp1, Beverly Hampton Phifer2
1National Milk Producers Federation, United States, Arlington, Virginia
2B.H. Phifer Consulting, United States, Mount Ulla, North Carolina

Introduction

The FARM Animal Care Program was created in 2009 by the National Milk Producers Federation with support from Dairy Management Incorporated (DMI Inc.). The dairy community recognized the need for data proof points to provide assurance to the dairy supply chain that milk is sourced from animals that are raised ethically and humane.

The FARM Animal Care Program defines dairy welfare and care based upon:
- Scientific research
- Facility neutrality
- Size neutrality
- Outcomes based

Aim

As a comprehensive and verifiable program, the FARM Animal Care Program assists U.S. dairy farmers, participating cooperatives, and processors in providing assurance to dairy buyers that animals are being raised in a humane and ethical manner. These assurances to dairy customers foster trust in the dairy supply chain, thereby providing market access to United States dairy producers.

Methods

The FARM Animal Care Program consists of three elements: Educational Materials & Resources, Second-Party Evaluations; and Third-Party Verification. To remain current with science and industry best management practices, each part of the program is updated every three years by the FARM Animal Care Technical Writing Group. The technical writing group is made up of animal welfare experts, veterinarians, farmers, and other industry members. The current members are: Nigel Cook, University of Wisconsin; David Darr, Dairy Farmers of America, Inc.; Chase DeCote, National BQA; Richard Don Jr., Mid-Maryland Vets; Marcia Endres, University of Minnesota; Paul Humphrey, Foremost Farms; Karen Jordan, Dairy Farmer; Steve Maddox, Dairy Farmer; Artonick Nickelson, Northwest Dairy Association; Tim Raasch, Land O’ Lakes; Keri Retallick, W-Coe Isom; Brandon Treichler, Select Milk Producers; Cassandra Tucker, University of California Davis; Fred Gingrich, American Association of Ibove Practitioners; Marina Von Keyersling, University of British Columbia.

Educational Materials & Resources

The National Dairy FARM Animal Care Program creates and procures on-farm resources to aid in improving the management and care of dairy cattle. The program works in partnership with industry stakeholders to provide the largest breadth of materials and reach the greatest audience possible.

Second-Party Evaluations

United States dairy cooperatives, processors and individual farms elect to participate in the FARM Animal Care Program. Member farms of active participants within the program must complete a second party evaluation conducted by a trained evaluator once every three years. Evaluation questions along with the FARM Animal Care Reference Manual is revised every three years by the FARM Animal Care Technical Writing Group. Evaluators must meet outlined prerequisites and complete annual recertification. A summary of the changes in each version are outlined in Figure 1.

Corrective Actions

During second party evaluations, evaluators may outline areas of improvement. Figure 2 outlines the timeline for resolution of these corrective actions.

Mandatory Corrective Action Plans

Mandatory Corrective Actions (MCAPs) are created for those farms who do not have a signed relationship with a dairy veterinarian, do not have annual employee animal care training or practice tail docking. These actions must be resolved in less than a year; or otherwise, the participating cooperative or processor risks suspension from the program.

Continuous Improvement Plans

Continuous Improvement Plans (CIPs) are established for lack of protocols for newborn and milk-fed dairy calves, protocols for pain management; protocols and training for non ambulatory animal management; protocols for euthanasia as well as insufficient animal observations scores for lameness, body condition and hock and knees. These actions must be resolved in three years or less.

Third-Party Verification

The National Dairy FARM Program contracts with an independent verifier to conduct third-party verification on a significant number of farms annually. These verifications serve to ensure consistency between second-party evaluations and program standards.

Results

Through June 2019, 26,084 dairy farms have completed a Second-Party Evaluations: 6,297 dairy farms have been issued MCAPs taking on average 22.7 weeks to complete and 4,923 dairy farms have been issued CIPs taking on average 26.4 weeks to complete. An individual dairy farm may have more than one MCAP and/or CIP. The most common MCAPs were documentation of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship and employee training. The most common CIPs were written protocols for calf management, euthanasia, and pain mitigation.

Conclusion

The entire dairy supply chain recognizes the importance of the FARM Animal Care Program. Participation by cooperatives and milk processors now over 98% of the fluid milk supply in the U.S. Additionally, the U.S. dairy industry’s commitment to work collectively toward continuous improvement has provided assurance and fostered trust within the dairy supply chain, allowing for continued market access domestically and abroad. The FARM Animal Care program partners with industry stakeholders to promote superior care and management of dairy cattle. The program framework allows for the recognition of good cattle management and steps to ensure continuous improvement.

References


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For more information, visit www.nationaldairyfarm.com