

The “On-The-Farm Self-Evaluation Guide”

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■ Take Home Message

- ▶ Animal rights activists are conducting campaigns to expose practices used on dairy farms that many non-dairy producers could find objectionable. These campaigns are a component of a deliberate strategy to outlaw dairy farming and animal agriculture in general.
- ▶ A second component of this strategy is to pass laws or regulations restricting, limiting or making illegal certain dairy farm practices most likely to be found objectionable by the general population.
- ▶ Establishment of accepted practices, such as the Canadian “Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle” is an excellent first step to legitimize proper practices.
- ▶ Development of self-inspection checklists to verify compliance with accepted practices is the current approach taken in the United States to help prevent forced inspection of dairy farms. Currently, audits of dairy farms by third-party organizations or individuals are possible, though these audits are little utilized due to the lack of economic incentive.

■ Introduction

A variety of animal rights organizations are conducting active campaigns to stop dairy producers from conducting lawful business practices on their dairy farms. Examples of these kinds of organizations include Farm Sanctuary (Anonymous_b) and the Vegan Society (Lymbery).

Changes in the way animals are raised can occur without having federal or provincial regulations. If there are a limited number of large companies that buy raw materials from farmers, process the materials and then sell the processed products to consumers, these few processing companies can dictate to farmers how the products can be raised. For example, McDonalds is a large fast-food restaurant chain that purchases incredible amounts of

meat, milk and cheese. Animal rights activists held campaigns against McDonalds concerning ‘downer cows.’ These are non-ambulatory cows brought to a slaughterhouse. The cows may have been injured during transit or on a farm prior to transport. Via a very effective campaign, the animal rights activists convinced McDonalds to require all companies that sold ground beef to them to certify that none of the beef came from downer cows. The only way that slaughterhouses could provide such certification was to no longer accept ‘downer cows’ for slaughter. Within one year, all major beef slaughter facilities would no longer accept ‘downer cows.’ No laws or government regulations were passed, yet a dramatic change occurred concerning slaughter of cull dairy cattle. A similar path was taken concerning changes in poultry housing and management practices.

■ On-The-Dairy Self-Evaluation Guide

In an attempt to provide an easy-to-use guide, the US National Milk Producers Federation and the Milk & Dairy Beef Quality Assurance Center, Inc. joined forces to develop a set of criteria for dairy animal care that could not only be scientifically defendable, but also practical for use by dairy producers. A publication was authored that describes the results of their evaluations (Carlson, Johnson and Bals). The list of organizations that endorse the Guide is impressive and includes the Food Marketing Institute/National Council of Chain Restaurants, Professional Dairy Heifer Growers Association, Holsteins Association, USA, American Association for Bovine Practitioners, National Mastitis Council, Association of Equipment Manufacturers, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, and the National Association of Animal Breeders. The publication has a checklist to easily use by a farmer or their veterinarian/advisor. The publication has a number of different topics than does the Canadian Recommended Code for dairy cattle (Anonymous_b).

The Self-Evaluation Guide is organized around ten “Quality Control Points.” Those Points include: producer and employee attitudes; evaluating animal health care; environment for dairy animals; facilities provided for dairy animals; dairy nutritional care: watering and feeding; evaluating milking procedures and equipment; transporting and handling animals; birth and management of calves; sick, hospitalized, nonambulatory and dead animals; and annual evaluation. Each of the Quality Control Points has between ten and twenty checklist items, for which a producer or their advisor answer yes, no or not applicable.

The Self-Evaluation Guide has some topics that are not covered as extensively or at all in the Canadian Code of Practice for dairy animals. Those topics include milking procedures, sick animals, producer/employee attitudes and evaluating animal health care. Topics concerning space, housing, nutrition and water requirements are similar between the two publications. A

detailed comparison of the two publications will be made during the presentation.

■ References

- Anonymous_a. (1991) Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of dairy cattle. Publication 1853E. Agriculture Canada Publications, Ottawa, Ont. 41 pp. http://www.carc-crac.ca/english/codes_of_practice/index.htm
- Anonymous_b. (2006) The Welfare of Cattle in Dairy Production: A Summary of the Scientific Evidence, a Farm Sanctuary Report. 30 pp http://www.farmsanctuary.org/campaign/dairy_report.pdf
- Carlson, K.R., C. Johnston and D. Bals. (2004) Caring for Dairy Animals – On-The-Dairy Self-Evaluation Guide. Agri-Education, Inc., Stratford, IA. <http://www.DQACenter.org>
- Lymbery, P. (2003) The Dairy Cow. Vegan Society article on exploitation of dairy cows. <http://www.vegansociety.com/html/animals/exploitation/cows/>