

Cattle Welfare

Bovine veterinarians must be committed to the humane treatment of cattle and their welfare. In the Veterinarian's Oath we swear to "use our scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the **protection of animal health and welfare**, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge". As veterinarians when we walk on a farm or participate in a team meeting one of our primary roles is to be the advocate for the cow.

The American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) supports the World Organization for Animal Health (2008) definition that an animal is in good welfare if it is:

- Healthy
- Comfortable
- Well nourished
- Safe
- Able to express innate behavior
- Not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress

Dairymen, cattlemen and veterinarians are concerned about animal welfare because we have a love for cattle, because it is the "right thing to do", and we also see that animals in a good state of welfare express good health and high production. Over the past several years, consumer groups are also concerned about animal welfare and want to see that our production animals enjoy good welfare. Milk processors recognize this and are requiring dairy farms to document good welfare practices. It is our job as veterinarians to assist our producers in achieving good welfare in their herds, and to help document that good welfare is taking place.

Dairy farmers must now document that they do not tail dock their cattle. The AVMA and AABP both oppose tail docking of cattle. **"The AABP opposes the routine tail docking of cattle. Current scientific literature indicates that routine tail docking provides no benefit to the animal."** (AABP Guidelines). The AVMA has a literature review on the Welfare Implications of **Tail Docking of Cattle** (August 29, 2014). The summary of the AVMA review states, "Anecdotal reports of the benefits of tail docking are not currently supported by data in the scientific literature". This AVMA review gives a very detailed assessment of 38 references.

Farm management practices that must be documented for milk processors include:

1. Calf care: colostrum management and care of the newborn
2. Cattle handling: document that handlers are trained and practice low stress cattle handling techniques
3. Feeding and nutrition program
4. Proper housing
5. Protocol for identification of sick animals and care of maternity cows and calf delivery
6. Treatment protocols and records
7. Vaccination protocols

8. Castration and dehorning protocols using local anesthetics and pain meds in appropriately aged animals
9. Lameness protocols: Practice lameness scoring and have protocols to diagnose and care for lame animals.
10. Transportation: Guidelines for loading animals and loading densities to minimize undue stress
11. Care of downer and non-ambulatory animals: A written plan must be in place to care for these animals. AABP has a guidance paper used in the development of this plan.
12. Humane euthanasia: AVMA and AABP Guidelines are used in the development of a farm euthanasia plan with criteria to select animals that require euthanasia, who is authorized to perform euthanasia, and the standard operating procedure for euthanasia.

Veterinarians must be involved in the development and implantation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and protocols that provide for good welfare of cattle in all of these areas. When good welfare is being practiced we should encourage our clients to be transparent in their farming practices so milk processors and consumers see the care that we provide for our animals.