

UPDATING OUR ANIMAL CARE TRAINING AND DOCUMENTATION FOR A CHANGING INDUSTRY

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Over the last eight or so years, animal care and well-being has become a hot topic for processors, consumers, industry groups and dairies. Dairy farms have been the focus of under cover videos by activist organizations that target dairy food processors to take action. Processors also receive input from customers by social media, phone lines and email questioning animal care practices on farms. Although there is less of a focus on national news, the topic still receives focus on social media and processors are making animal care programs a requirement for access to their market.

With that pressure, the industry has responded by creating animal care programs and guidelines with the help of veterinarians and industry experts. The NY State Cattle Health Assurance Program (NYSCHAP) was one of the first groups to develop a program that included an audit with a pass/fail system and requirements for standard operating procedures (SOPs) and documentation. The guideline and module still exist but there is no longer an audit portion. On the heels of that program, National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) organized the Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Program. This is a similar outline and requirements but stands on the idea of continuous improvement and includes evaluations instead of pass/fail audits.

FARM is now the program of choice for 98% of the milk supply. NMPF is working hard to get processors to agree to the standards of this program in place of utilizing a variety of standards that would confuse consumers and the industry. So far, it has been very successful and the FARM Program has responded to the needs of the industry by increasing the rigor and evaluating standards. The program now includes Mandatory Action Plans if a dairy is not complying with the program and if the action plan is not followed, can result in probation and eventual suspension from FARM. Since most processors require farms to follow the standards of FARM, milk marketing groups have an interest in encouraging compliance to the program.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is another organization that impacts animal care programs and training. OSHA is exclusively concerned with the well being and safety of employees so animal care is not the focus for the organization. The way animals are cared for and worked with impacts the safety of workers. Therefore, on our dairy farms, there is a requirement to train workers on how to move and work with large animals. OSHA can come on to any dairy with eleven or more employees for a variety of reasons. If their reason looks at the interaction

between employees and animals then they will want to see that there are standards being followed in relation to training on how to care for and work with animals.

These two areas of requirement are fairly new concepts to the industry. We are just working out how to do all of the training and documentation of that training. Many dairies do more training than they take credit for and we have to change our mindset. Organizations, governmental (OSHA) and non-governmental (NMPF/FARM), won't take your word for it that you do what you say you do. Every farm, no matter the size, needs to take an approach of quality assurance and document everything.

On the training side, there are many options and programs.

- Procedure and care training from your herd veterinarian
- Industry representatives offer trainings
- Meetings and courses
- University/CCE/PRO-DAIRY training - in person and/or on line
- NYCAMH (<http://www.nycamh.org/programs/farmsafetytrainings/>)
- On-line video training:
 - DairyCare 365 (<https://www.dairycares365.com>)
 - FARM (<http://nationaldairyfarm.com>)
 - Seelt? StopIt! (<http://www.seeitstopit.org>)
 - YouTube:
 - U.S. Agricultural Safety and Health Centers (<https://www.youtube.com/user/USAgCenters>)
 - UMASH (Stockmanship training, needlestick safety)
 - UW Milk Quality
 - look up animal handling for Temple Grandin trainings, National BQA training, Alberta Agriculture, etc.

Those are just a few examples of the ever increasing number of training options for animal handling and care. Quite a few are offered in both English and Spanish.

As for documentation, it can be formal or informal. The important thing is that there is documentation of the subject and topics covered, the date, attendees and trainer. Some of the on-line options, such as DairyCare 365 have an option to print a participation certificate after taking a short test to assure understanding. This is great, especially for overview topics. But, when your vet takes a couple employees out to demonstrate tubing a calf, please make sure they make up a sign in sheet and document that training. It can be hand written, on any paper. There are no set rules for this, just make sure it is documented and one can understand what was accomplished if looking at it in a training binder.

In general, our informal trainers are not thinking of the knowledge they are sharing as training and don't think about documenting what they share. We need to change the culture to take credit for what is done on the farm. If the farm owner goes out to demonstrate use of the crowd gate and shows the milkers or pushers a few concepts and how to use that equipment safely and humanely, they need to write it down and date it. Both FARM and OSHA may want to see that documentation.

In the face of a farm accident or undercover video, the farm will want to have as much training documented as possible. They will also want their animal care agreements up to date. Make sure to review the Seelt? StopIt! program or similar concept so workers have signed off on the fact that they are not to abuse animals nor ignore others abusing animals.

This is an enormous change for the industry and can seem tedious and insulting. Nevertheless, to sell milk, consumers are demanding more oversight in the area of animal well-being. Documentation and training can be used to positively impact the dairy farm. Employees can have deeper understanding of their jobs and the animals they work with. Employers will have better documentation of what they can expect from their employees. In most areas on the dairy, we need to be able to prove that we do what we say we do. Animal care has been added to the list and is in good company with treatments and drug use, feeding, manure management, employee management, etc.