

The National Dairy Industry Animal Welfare Strategy

Lameness

Minimise lameness through adoption of practices to prevent, detect and treat cases on farms

- A 2008 national survey of dairy farmers found that almost all Australian dairy farmers have a strategy in place to prevent lameness. This has contributed to a drop in overall levels of lameness in the Australian dairy herd, which are significantly lower than levels reported for northern hemisphere dairy cattle.
- Dairy Australia is working with Regional Development Programs and has prepared national resources for farmer workshops on identification and prevention of lameness on farm.
- Prompt and effective treatment and acting to prevent lameness promotes good production and welfare of dairy cattle.
- Lameness can significantly affect a dairy cow's ability to graze and compete for food. Lameness can also add significant costs to dairy farmers through lost production, lowered fertility, increased risk of culling and increased treatment costs.

Dairy industry contacts for further information

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The ADIC is the national peak policy body for the Australian dairy industry and represents all sectors of industry on issues of national and international importance. Our constituent organisations - Australian Dairy Farmers Limited and the Australian Dairy Products Federation - represent the interests of dairy farmers, manufacturers, processors and traders across Australia. The ADIC's role is to bring together these members to establish and present a unified dairy position on issues that affect the industry's future across the entire value chain.

Dairy Australia is the industry's services provider; owned by the industry, whose members are farmers and industry bodies and invests approx. \$30 million of dairy farmer levy payments and \$15 million of taxpayer funds in projects and services for the benefit of the Australian dairy industry.

The Australian dairy industry takes its responsibilities for animal welfare seriously and has a national dairy industry animal welfare strategy.

National Dairy Industry Animal Welfare Strategy

Vision

The dairy industry, a leader in the care of our animals

Mission

Providing leadership to enhance our record for animal care to ensure community confidence and market access.

Objectives

To provide:

- Government, community and customer confidence in Australian dairy production systems and animal welfare practices.
- A framework for continuous review and improvement
- Effective processes to identify, prioritise and respond to animal welfare issues

Outcomes

- 1 The government, community and consumers see the Australian dairy industry as a leader in animal welfare
- 2 The Australian dairy industry is able to trade into markets of choice
- 3 Australian dairy farmers can continue to work responsibly with animals

The national dairy industry animal welfare strategy supports the Federal Government's Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) with a vision that the welfare of all animals in Australia is promoted and protected by the adoption of practical, effective and humane animal welfare standards.

The dairy industry has five priority areas in animal welfare that it is addressing. These areas are calf management, tail docking, calving induction, disbudding and lameness. Pain management within these priority areas is also being addressed by industry.

An overview

What the dairy industry is doing to address its animal welfare priority areas

Calf Management

Ensuring calves are managed across the supply chain to meet agreed industry practices and standards

- All calves are essential for dairy farming and must be managed with care. Sound animal husbandry practices and management systems are the key to delivering good calf welfare.
- Animal welfare requirements apply to all calves born on farm, whether they are destined for the milking herd, reared elsewhere for dairy beef or marketed for veal.
- The Australian dairy industry promotes good calf management. We work closely with stakeholders such as the Australian meat industry, animal welfare groups and government to produce codes of practice and legislation to ensure compliance with agreed standards.
- The Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Cattle includes provisions for the calf welfare and the National Vendor Declaration for bobby calves also provides assurance for calves being transported for sale or slaughter about residues and calf welfare requirements.
- We also work with organisation such as the Professional Calf Rearers Association of Australian and Meat & Livestock Australia to provide information to farmers on best practice calf rearing and to ensure that there are alternative options available for farmers looking to add value to their calves.
- An industry trial was initiated in July 2008 to investigate the adoption of more efficient, streamlined mechanisms for traceability of dairy calves from farm to slaughter. The trial has been designed to enable all stakeholders in the dairy calf supply chain to demonstrate they have met their animal welfare and market responsibilities in the sale of dairy calves.

Tail Docking

The Australian dairy industry does not support tail docking and promotes alternatives

- A 2008 national survey of dairy farmers reported that 90% of dairy farmers now choose to use alternatives to tail docking. Switch trimming is now the most common practice used on Australian dairy farms to avoid the problems caused by dirty tails.
- This change in practice has been mainly influenced by dairy farmer concerns over cow comfort and welfare.
- In the past dairy cows' tails have been removed to improve the occupational health and safety of staff and to help manage mastitis. In recent years, changes to milking sheds and improvements in mastitis prevention and control have made tail docking largely redundant in Australia. Dairy farm programs such as Countdown Downunder are in place to assist Australian dairy farmers control mastitis.
- Tail docking of cattle is prohibited in some Australian states, except where prescribed and performed by a registered veterinarian. In other jurisdictions the procedure is governed by the Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Cattle.

Calving Induction

Reduced requirement for calving induction through support of sound farm management practices

- A 2008 national survey of Australian dairy farmers showed that the routine use of calving induction in seasonal dairy herds is declining. Dairy farmers are switching to alternatives such as split or year round calving patterns, improved reproduction programs and better nutrition.
- The Australian dairy industry welcomes this decline and recognises the welfare concerns associated with calving induction.
- During 2006 a national extension program, InCalf, was implemented to help Australian dairy farmers manage dairy herd fertility. InCalf recommends that calving induction only be performed as part of a calving management plan and that it be performed under the supervision of a veterinarian. InCalf is expected to further reduce calving induction and associated welfare implications.
- Animal welfare can be compromised if calving induction results in a weak calf requiring special care and attention, or in some cases immediate humane destruction. The welfare of the induced cow can be compromised as the procedure increases the risk of mastitis, metabolic diseases, retained membranes and infection.

Disbudding

Disbudding of calves is undertaken in preference to dehorning of cattle at an older age

- Cattle without horns are less likely to injure herd mates and livestock handlers.
- Research has found disbudding calves is less painful and less likely to cause infection than dehorning, which is usually performed on older cattle (Stafford, K.J. and Mellor, D.J. 2005: Dehorning and disbudding distress and its alleviation in calves. Vet J. 169: 337-349.).
- The Model Code of Practice for Welfare of Animals – Cattle recommends that cattle are disbudded as young as possible, preferably before they are 6 months of age. This is supported by the dairy industry and disbudding calves is now the most common practice on Australian dairy farms.
- A 2008 national survey found that most Australian dairy farmers disbud calves at an appropriate age using suitable equipment instead of dehorning. Dairy farmers prefer these practices because they are linked with good animal welfare outcomes and ease of management.

