1. Animal Welfare Workshop

Title presentation

The Intersection of On-Farm Animal Welfare Evaluation and Technology Integration as the Future of Animal-Based Indicators for Animal Welfare Measurement: an Example from the United States

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Abstract

Introduction: In 2009, the National Milk Producers Federation with support from the U.S. levy program Dairy Management Inc. developed the National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Animal Care Program. Through FARM Animal Care, the U.S. dairy industry has embraced on-farm evaluations to assess animal welfare through various science-driven standards and best practices, instilling a commitment to continuous improvement.

Methods: As the world's first Animal Care program to meet the International Organization for Standardization Technical Specification requirements for the World Organization for Animal Health dairy cattle welfare standards, FARM Animal Care provides assurances throughout the supply chain regarding on-farm animal welfare through three primary components: best management practice manuals, second-party farm evaluations conducted by trained and certified evaluators and independent third-party verification to demonstrate the program's integrity.

The second-party farm evaluation follows a standardized protocol and evaluation rubric based upon current FARM Program standards and best practices. Triennial on-farm evaluations include interviews with farm owners and employees, review of content and implementation of written protocols, and evaluation of animal-based indicators for animal welfare.

The animal-based indicators for animal welfare, each having a unique scoring system with industry benchmark, are conducted through observation of individual animals. These include:

1. Body Condition Score – an indicator for nutritionally adequacy

2. Hygiene Score – an indicator for sanitation and cleanliness

3. Locomotion Score – an indicator for hoof and leg health

4. Hock and Knee Lesion Score – an indicator for resting area conditions

5. Broken Tail – an indicator for stockmanship

Newer on-farm technology data streams, ranging from in-line milk quality readers to animal activity monitoring, will be incorporated into FARM Animal Care as an overlay for key animal welfare indicators augmenting existing on-farm evaluations. Program implementation burden on dairy farmers and cooperatives and processors will be eased while providing more objective, animal-based data to support demonstrating U.S. dairy's commitment to animal welfare.

Results: Robust adoption has allowed the U.S. dairy industry a unified approach to animal welfare. Today FARM Animal Care participation includes 99% of U.S. milk production from dairy farmers in 49 states – 31,000+ dairy farm participants from 130+ dairy cooperatives and processors. Integration of newer on-farm technology data streams into FARM Animal Care will enhance animal-based indicators for animal welfare providing stronger assurances for the supply chain.