

Animal Welfare in Organic Dairies

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Keeping dairy livestock healthy and productive is the most important goal for all organic dairy producers. Every organic dairy owner or employee has a strong desire to maintaining the highest standards of animal health and welfare. In many organic dairies, the directives and measurement of that health have traditionally been more qualitative than quantitative. Close, regular observation and care by the knowledgeable dairy producer has helped ensure that animals are kept healthy and productive.

A more quantitative, measurable approach to animal welfare has been developed by researchers such as Temple Grandin, Ph.D. of Colorado State University. Dr. Grandin's philosophy is to document and measure animal welfare across a selected number of highly quantifiable parameters. Each parameter is carefully chosen to be a "key indicator" of several different health problems. In Dr. Grandin's approach, one must document welfare, then quantify it, then measure it, then track it over time in order to improve it. Other researchers have expanded Dr. Grandin's work and have adapted her techniques to dairy production systems. These dairy welfare systems allow the dairy farmer to measure, track, evaluate and compare animal welfare in different organic dairies as well as across different production systems. The following measurement parameters and standards are used frequently and effectively to evaluate animal welfare in dairies across the country.

Parameter	Standard
Lameness	<5% score 3 or more during locomotion score observation
Body Condition Score	<3% score < 2.0 on Observation <10% score >4.0 on Observation
Footing Evaluation	<1% move throughout the facility falling <4% move throughout the facility slipping
Hygiene	<10% score > 2.0 on observation
Parlor Management	Milking equipment has been tested in the last 6 months Waiting time in parlor/holding pen <5 hr./group/24hr. Parlor behavior score less or equal 2.
Water	Positioned around dairy to allow ad lib. access
Herd Health Program	Written protocols
Housing/Facilities	Prevent injuries, air flow for ammonia control, comfort during inclement weather, Visitor entry control. Stocking rate <120% of stalls.

There are several benefits to the system described above:

1. Animal welfare is documented and quantified across readily-measured parameters, vs. an ad hoc or qualitative (and hence open to interpretation or error) assessment of health.
2. A limited number of parameters are chosen to serve as "key indicators" for a greater number of health issues (e.g. body condition)
3. These limited parameters are tracked regularly, vs. irregular or intermittent assessment of a much greater number of parameters.
4. The quantitative system accommodates benchmarking, more accurate "point in time" assessments and improved ability to track over time.
5. Improvements are more easily measured because the same parameters are measured in the same manner each time.

6. The parameters of animal health are universally recognized, allowing farmers, veterinarians, researchers etc. to use common and agreed-to measures, assessments, terminology, etc.

The quantitative measure of animal welfare is certainly no substitute for the skills of the caring, knowledgeable organic dairy farmer. However, this system provides important and usable information that helps the farmer manage the herd more effectively, more humanely and with higher productivity.