

# Animal care - U.S. Dairy's science-based, outcomes-oriented standards & achievements



## Introduction

Animal care is the responsibility of every animal producer, and consumers today expect and deserve safe, wholesome dairy, produced responsibly. That's why the U.S. dairy industry is committed to maintaining a forward leaning track record of developing and implementing outstanding programs to achieve the highest standards for animal care.

These standards are assured through the National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Program.<sup>1</sup> The FARM Program raises the bar for the entire U.S. dairy industry by setting evidence-based standards for: animal care, environmental stewardship, antibiotic stewardship, workforce development and biosecurity. Program participation is open to all U.S. dairy farmers, cooperatives, and processors.

**Animal care and humane handling are rooted in U.S. dairy's culture and remain central in dairy operations. Good care practices are reinforced throughout job expectations and daily functions on farm. U.S. dairy's commitment to animal care is a core value of the industry. More than 99% of the U.S. milk supply comes from farms participating in the FARM Animal Care Program.**



*1: The FARM Program was created in 2009 by the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) with support from Dairy Management Inc.™ These organizations represent U.S. dairy farmers and cooperatives supporting precompetitive efforts that benefit the entire industry.*



# Animal care standards, resources, and evaluation

FARM participants follow rigorous guidelines to ensure the highest level of care for animals on American dairy farms, while also committing to continuous improvement. Strong farm management practices are ethical obligations of any dairy business and are vital to ensure long-term success of the dairy industry.

## Animal care is a science-based, outcome-oriented pillar within the FARM Program.

The program establishes:

- On-farm best management practices.
- Standards for on-farm second-party evaluations.
- Third-party verification to guarantee the rigor and integrity of FARM Animal Care Program implementation.

The FARM Program provides comprehensive resources for implementation at the farm and participant level, including manuals, templates, posters and videos available free-of-charge at [www.nationaldairyfarm.com](http://www.nationaldairyfarm.com). For example, the FARM Program [Animal Care Reference Manual](#) includes extensive resources, on best practices, template checklists, and references to external tools and programs on veterinary review, records, and protocols; continuing education for all employees with animal care responsibilities; animal care and handling metrics and guidelines; and antibiotic stewardship.

Evaluation is core to good standing and continuous improvement. To be considered certified in the FARM Animal Care Program, participating facilities must be evaluated at least once every three years by a qualified and trained second-party evaluator, typically co-op/processor staff, veterinarians or independent dairy consultants. If the second-party evaluation identifies areas of improvement, action plans must be developed and corrective actions must be taken within clearly established timeframes, or FARM certification will be conditionally suspended until the required standards are met.

Qualified third-party verifiers evaluate a representative percentage of participating farms each year to ensure program integrity.



## Antibiotic stewardship

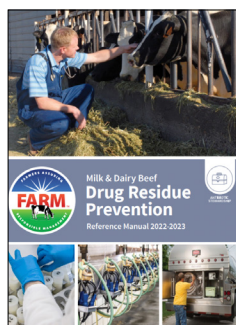
Healthy animals are a source of safe food, and disease prevention keeps them healthy. If dairy cattle get sick or injured and treatment is necessary. In the United States, dairy farmers and veterinarians administer antibiotics prudently and under veterinary guidance. To ensure safe food, U.S. dairy farmers use antibiotics only for approved indications according to label directions. Animals being treated for illness or injury are separated from other animals, and their milk is also segregated, following strict guidelines. Withdrawal periods, specified for every federally approved drug or animal health product, determine the amount of time required after ending treatment before the animal's milk may again be collected for sale.

All milk in the United States is required to be screened for antibiotic and other residues, and the entire contents of any milk truck tanker that tests positive for violative residues would be discarded and never sold.

The FARM Program has, since its inception, helped go above and beyond exclusive regulatory compliance by implementing evidence-based tools and best practices that help to protect the U.S. food supply, including milk and meat, against accidental contamination with violative residues of drugs, pesticides or other agents that could compromise food safety.

## The FARM Drug Residue and Prevention Manual

is the primary educational tool for U.S. dairy farmers on the judicious and responsible use of antibiotics, including avoiding drug residues in milk and meat. The [Prevention Manual](#) provides farmers and evaluators with a quick, easy reference to the updated list of approved drugs, screening tests, and withdrawal times under the FARM Program.



Through the **Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank (FARAD)**, scientists determine appropriate withdrawal periods and provide this information to veterinarians, extension specialists and farmers through a toll-free call center, as well as a publicly-accessible website (FARMWeb).



**Food Armor** is an organization dedicated to improving antimicrobial stewardship practices in food animal agriculture. [Food Armor](#) teaches residue prevention, food safety principles, responsible drug use practices and antimicrobial stewardship. It offers an online educational platform providing high-quality stewardship education to veterinarians and farmers, equipping them with the tools to develop, implement and monitor antimicrobial stewardship plans.

## FARM Program achievements

- More than 99% of the U.S. milk supply comes from farms participating in the FARM Program Animal Care Program.
- In 2018, FARM became the first livestock animal care program in the world to be recognized as complying with requirements set by the International Organization for Standardization and meeting the stringent, internationally recognized animal welfare standards set by the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH).
- Through the FARM Program animal care pillar, 5,350 animal care evaluations were conducted in 2021. More than 71% of facilities had a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship, and more than 82% met the stockmanship training requirement for family and nonfamily employees.
- More than 450 trained and certified second-party evaluators have conducted more than 50,000 on-farm evaluations since the FARM Program's inception.
- In 2022, FARM Animal Care Program co-led an initiative with National Beef Quality Assurance to elevate U.S. calf raiser standards by uniting around key best management practices.
- The most recent update to the FARM Program includes a new program area for biosecurity, which has important links to animal care. This program will allow for development of tools like an everyday biosecurity and best practice reference manual, as well as enhanced biosecurity measures to ensure business continuity in the event of a zoonotic disease outbreak.

## Conclusion

As science and best practices of caring for animals evolve and advance, the FARM Program is a key way the U.S. dairy industry ensures its commitment to continuous improvement and the highest standards of animal care - because it's the right thing to do for cows, customers and consumers.

