



Agriculture's Commitment to Animal Well-Being

Animal Welfare and Food Protection

Each segment of the livestock and poultry industries have species-specific educational programs, guidelines and best management practices focused on proper care, handling, facilities and transportation of animals. These programs and guidelines continue to evolve and improve as each industry gains a better understanding of what is necessary for the well-being of animals, through research.

Training each animal caretaker is of the utmost importance to ensuring the best animal care possible. This is why farms participate in certification programs, distance-learning courses and other means for continuing education on animal care.

Animal production facilities are built to maintain the health and safety of each animal. In many/most of today's production systems, animals are raised comfortably indoors. This arrangement allows producers and veterinarians to closely monitor herd health, control temperature, ensure a nutritionally balanced diet and keep the animals safe from predators.

The Humane Slaughter Act regulates the U.S. meat packing industry. Federal inspectors utilize the Act to ensure compliance in livestock packing plants on a frequent basis. If violations are found, immediate action is taken. The livestock industry has voluntary guidelines in addition to the Act that meet even higher standards for animal care.

American farmers and ranchers have been working with veterinarians, animal scientists, agricultural engineers and animal well-being experts to develop and support ethically grounded, science-based guidelines and audits. Changes to animal well-being guidelines should be based on data, expert analysis and economic feasibility. Today, the marketplace offers meat, milk and eggs produced in a variety of systems.

Species- Specific Animal Welfare Guidelines

Because each livestock and poultry sector is committed to providing the best care for its food animals, each species has developed an animal welfare program to meet those best management practices.

CHICKENS

The physical well-being of animals is very important to the broiler chicken industry, especially since only healthy animals can be utilized for human food. To assist companies in ensuring and verifying a high level of welfare exists among their animals, the National Chicken Council developed the *NCC Animal Welfare Guidelines and Audit Checklist*, which has been widely adopted within the industry. It covers every phase of the chicken's life and offers science-based recommendations for proper treatment. Among other things, it includes chapters on

- Education, training and planning
- Best practices on the farm
- Appropriate comfort and shelter
- Proper nutrition and feeding
- Catching and transportation
- Health care
- Processing

Key Points:

- *Farmers and ranchers have an ethical obligation to care for animals raised for food*
- *Animal well-being is critical to providing quality food products*
- *Animal care is the highest priority for both large and small farms*
- *Standards for animal care should be based on the expertise of those who work with farm animals daily*
- *Unfounded regulations will increase food prices and boost the volume of products shipped from areas with inferior food safety records*
- *Consumers should be able to buy protein from any system that meets their needs*

The guidelines are backed up by a detailed audit checklist that can be completed by the company itself, a customer representative, or a third-party auditor. The NCC program was accepted in 2005 by the Food Marketing Institute and National Council of Chain Restaurants. Program details can be found at www.nationalchickencouncil.com/files/AnimalWelfare2005.pdf.

LAYER HENS (EGGS)

In 2002, the United Egg Producers (UEP) adopted guidelines for animal welfare developed by an independent third party Scientific Advisory Committee. *Animal Husbandry Guidelines for Egg Laying Flocks* provides science-based guidelines for all aspects of egg production, including the following:

- Cage configuration
- Handling
- Beak trimming
- Transportation and slaughter
- Cage space per bird
- Molting
- Cage free guidelines

These recommendations also became the basis for an animal-welfare certification initiative sponsored by UEP called UEP Certified. The animal husbandry guidelines within the UEP Certified program are endorsed by the Food Marketing Institute and the National Council of Chain Restaurants and have been used as a model for the creation of animal husbandry guidelines by the International Egg Commission. In addition, UEP partners with the American Humane Association in the American Humane Certified program. This program establishes guidelines for egg production from hens in cage-free and free-range farm systems; thus it is a good balance to the UEP Certified program's certification of both modern cage housing and cage-free production systems.

Egg farmers who implement the UEP Certified program must be audited annually by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service or Validus, to achieve and maintain their UEP Certified status. As well, producers must implement the guidelines in 100 percent of their production facilities regardless of where or how eggs are marketed. Today, more than 80 percent of all eggs in the United States are produced under the UEP Certified program. UEP has certified well-being programs for eggs raised in caged and cage-free systems. Consumers can now choose eggs from either system and know that UEP Certified eggs come from a scientifically validated, independently audited well-being program. Details of the program are on the UEP website at www.uepcertified.com/docs/UEP-Animal-Welfare-Guidelines-2007-2008.pdf.

DUCKS

The U.S. Duck Council is committed to promoting and maintaining comprehensive animal welfare standards throughout the White Pekin duckling industry. The U.S. Duck Council and its members produce quality food products for consumers, while ensuring that ducks receive humane treatment. Ducks are raised according to the highest standards by upholding scientifically based animal husbandry practices. The U.S. Duck Council's animal welfare standards were developed in conjunction with animal husbandry experts. Elements of the standards include:

- Health and hygiene
- Shelter and growing environment
- Biosecurity
- Transportation and handling

TURKEYS

The turkey industry has long held that appropriate treatment of turkeys is a necessary part of production and the National Turkey Federation (NTF) *Humane Production Guidelines* have been in place in the industry since the late 1980s. The most recent guidelines identify control points in turkey production and processing, providing recommendations to ensure animal welfare standards in the following areas:

- Farm safety and security
- Hatching
- Facilities and equipment
- Feed and water supply
- Maintenance

- Bird comfort
- Training

These guidelines represent the most up-to-date scientific information available to ensure the health and well-being of turkeys and continue to be updated as new scientific data, technologies and/or processes become available. Developed by leading turkey industry experts, the guidelines have been evaluated and approved through numerous third-party scientific reviews. Third-party scientific reviews by the Federation of Animal Science Societies (FASS) Animal Welfare Committee and the American Association of Avian Pathologists (AAAP) Welfare Subcommittee as well as the AAAP Board of Directors, received approval and support. Both organizations praised the *NTF Animal Care Guidelines* as a well-written document and a model program for the turkey industry to follow. To review the NTF's *Animal Care Guidelines*, visit www.eatturkey.com/foodsrv/pdf/NTF_animal_care.pdf.

SWINE

The National Pork Board supports animal welfare guidelines based on sound science through the Pork Quality Assurance Plus™ program. PQA Plus™ was created to integrate industry practices that insure food safety and animal welfare. It was developed by university researchers, pork producers representing 13 states experienced with all production system types and allied industry representatives. The program combines guidelines for providing proper care to improve swine well-being with a curriculum that specifically addresses caretaker training, animal observation, emergency back-up support, space allocation, timely euthanasia, facilities, handling and movement, ventilation and air quality, and zero tolerance for willful acts of abuse. Most major packers require producers to be PQA Plus™ certified to ensure that food animals meet quality assurance protocols. The program has three stages, as follows:

- Individual certification through producer education
- Site status through on-farm site assessment
- Opportunity for on-farm audits

PQA Plus™ demonstrates the commitment U.S. pork producers make to providing pork that is safe, high quality and responsibly produced. To review the PQA Plus program, visit www.pork.org/Producers/PQA/PQAPlus.aspx.

The industry also administers a Transport Quality Assurance (TQA) program that provides guidelines for the handling, loading, transport, and unloading of all sizes of pigs. The program is geared toward on-farm animal handlers, transporters, and those who handle pigs at the destination site. It is a voluntary education/certification program that may be required by packers and producers.

DAIRY CATTLE

The National Milk Producers Federation, in conjunction with the Milk and Beef Dairy Quality Assurance (DQA) Center, introduced the *Caring for Dairy Animals Technical Reference Guide and On-The-Dairy Self-Evaluation Guide* in 2002 to serve as a reference manual for dairy producers. The manual addresses all key elements of dairy animal care and recommends best management practices. Some areas of focus in the manual are:

- Producer and employee training
- Dairy nutritional care: watering and feeding
- Transporting and handling animals
- Birth and management of calves

Also included in the *Guide* is a voluntary self-audit checklist for producers. The self-audit addresses quality control points that can be objectively observed by the producer and help the producer enhance their existing animal care practices. These dairy animal care guidelines are endorsed by the National Council of Chain Restaurants (NCCR) and the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). To learn more about the dairy industry's *Guide*, visit www.dqacenter.org.

Because the dairy industry has various sectors, it created a National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative, a producer-led coalition that includes each sector of the industry. The group has proposed a set of principles and guidelines intended to provide a uniform umbrella of assurance that the industry is meeting its ethical obligation for dairy animal well-being. The goal is to demonstrate dairy producers' commitment to animal well-being. www.dairywellbeing.org

VEAL CALVES

The American veal industry has committed to a complete transition to group housing by 2017, a move that underscores the industry's commitment to the health and well-being of its animals. Presently, more than 10 percent of veal is reared in group

housing, and the current industry Veal Quality Assurance Program standards require animal welfare be certified by an attending veterinarian.

The American Veal Association is calling for continued research and investment in animal husbandry and group production technology. An integrated welfare model that combines environment, facility design, health, handling and behavior is available to all producers. To learn more about the Veal Quality Assurance Program, visit www.vealfarm.com.

BEEF CATTLE

The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program provides a producer-driven approach to producing the safest and best quality beef possible. The program began in 1987 and is supported by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) an organization funded by beef producers nationwide and the Beef Checkoff. The BQA program provides guidelines for livestock care and handling, nutrition and veterinary treatment. Cattlemen can become BQA certified when they meet criteria for quality beef production set forth in the BQA guidelines. BQA influences the management practices of more than 90 percent of cattle. Producers also undergo continuous training to remain certified. Most states have individual BQA programs and can offer their own certification standards. State certification requirements vary, but may include third party verification and testing procedures to ensure good management practices. For more information about NCBA's BQA, visit www.bqa.org.

Quality assurance during transportation also plays a critical role in the health and welfare of beef cattle, as proper handling and transport of cattle can reduce sickness in calves, prevent bruises, and improve the quality of the meat from these animals. The NCBA Master Cattle Transporter program (for cattle transporters) is part of the BQA initiative. The program consists of educational materials in a manual and on a training video. The *Master Cattle Transporter Guide* educates on properly moving cattle up to and in to the trailer, distributing cattle correctly on the trailer, hauling techniques that reduce cattle stress and handling emergency situations. A transportation quality assurance for stocker trailers is currently being developed. The Master Cattle Transporter program was developed utilizing the expertise of animal handling and transport consultants, producers, auction operators, feed yard managers, packer representatives and University researchers/experts. To learn more about the program, go to www.tbqa.org.

In addition to NCBA programs and state BQA programs, other organizations offer quality assurance programs, such as the certification provided by the Texas Cattle Feeders Association (TCFA). The TCFA program includes a third-party review and annual audit by a veterinarian or nutritionist to ensure specific criteria are met for nutrition, disease prevention, identification, and adequate shelter and housing.

SHEEP

The *Sheep Care Guide*, sponsored by the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), provides sheep producers with research-based guidelines in such areas as nutrition, facilities and handling, animal health, transportation and managing predation in order to assist them in providing optimum care for their sheep. Originally published in 1996, the 2005 edition has been updated and expanded to include relevant new research findings regarding animal care. ASI's well-known publication, the *Sheep Production Handbook*, provides producers a resource of in-depth background information for designing and implementing their specific farm management plans and is frequently used as a classroom textbook at colleges and universities. The ASI Sheep Safety and Quality Assurance Program provides producer-level training and certification in total quality management including proper handling and care of sheep. For more information about the *Sheep Care Guide*, visit www.sheepusa.org.

PACKING/PROCESSING

The U.S. meat packing industry for livestock is regulated by the Humane Slaughter Act. Federal inspectors in plants ensure compliance during every minute of operation in accordance with this important law and can take immediate action for violations.

In 1991, the industry teamed with leading animal welfare expert Dr. Temple Grandin to develop voluntary guidelines that took federal regulations a step further. In 1997, the American Meat Institute and Dr. Grandin developed an audit program to measure key factors in processing plants that can indicate stress, including how often livestock vocalize, whether they slip or fall, and how often they must be prodded to encourage them to walk forward. By measuring welfare using objective criteria, the industry improved welfare in plants dramatically. Today, this audit program has become a global animal welfare standard. Compliance with the standard is often required in order to sell meat to key customers. For more information about the U.S. meat packing industry's animal handling guidelines, visit www.meatami.com.

Animal Welfare Resources

American Meat Institute : www.meatami.com

American Veal Association : www.vealfarm.com

Master Cattle Transporter Program: www.tbqa.org

National Pork Board: www.pork.org

American Sheep Industry Association: www.sheepusa.org

Beef Quality Assurance Program: www.bqa.org

National Milk Producers Federation: www.dairywellbeing.org

National Turkey Federation: www.eatturkey.com

National Chicken Council: www.nationalchickencouncil.com

Animal Agriculture Alliance Coalition Members

American Farm Bureau Federation

Animal Agriculture Alliance

Animal Health Institute

American Meat Institute

National Chicken Council

National Milk Producers Federation

National Pork Board

National Pork Producers Council

National Turkey Federation

United Egg Producers

U.S. Poultry & Egg Association

United Soybean Board

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