



## National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative — What Does it Mean to You?

Perhaps you've heard some rumors about a new animal initiative, and you're wondering what this latest buzz is all about. You may have questions regarding what the National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative (NDAWBI) is and why it should be of interest to the dairy industry. Is it another government mandate that will ultimately serve to shackle our independence as we go about the job we've chosen: to provide dairy products to an ever-increasing populace? Is it the work of another activist group trying to curtail our freedom, or maybe even another marketing ploy used to add perceived value in the marketplace? Or it might even be that this initiative has come about for some valid reasons.

In fact, members of the dairy industry are leaders in getting this initiative underway. The National Dairy Animal Well-Being Initiative Coalition is the name of the group that has been formed and is developing broad principles and guidelines. The Coalition is a broad-based group that includes dairy co-ops, National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), Dairy Management Inc. (DMI), animal health companies, banks, individuals, educators, and others.

The Coalition, having witnessed what has happened in the poultry and pork industries in terms of

animal care guidelines, decided it would be beneficial for dairy producers to put forth general guidelines for animal care rather than be forced to accept rules promulgated by those who really don't understand the dairy industry. The Coalition publicly "kicked off" the effort in October 2007 at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin.

Our industry hasn't come under the same level of criticism as pork and poultry, but it is probably just a matter of time before we do. An oft-used coaching cliché seems appropriate here, "The best defense is a good offense." We as an industry often fall short of doing an adequate job of spreading the word about the responsible way we treat our animals. This effort will provide us with an opportunity to rectify our past shortcomings in the area of letting people know that we have been treating our animals — and we will continue to do so — in a manner that provides for their well being.

We've been able to address the issue of animal well-being up to this point by saying "Trust me; I know how to treat animals correctly, and that is what I practice." But as time goes by and our consumers are further and further removed from any practical knowledge of food animal production practices, the harder it becomes to address their concerns with the simple "trust me" statement. Many consumers view all animals like they view their pets, as members of their families. While we view production animals with respect and concern for their comfort and well-being, we do not view them as pets or as members of our families. It is that difference we need

to address. Looking forward, we probably need to at least outline our practices with more clarity.

Many of the organizations representing animal agriculture (including NMPF) have developed animal care guidelines. This project isn't meant to supersede those guidelines but rather to provide the broad parameters under which guidelines should be constructed and provide a degree of consistency across all participating organizations. Consistency would provide more trust in our efforts than if we were all approaching care from uncoordinated different perspectives.

MMPA has at this point endorsed the concept presented by the Coalition. The board members and staff will study the draft guidelines and make any comments that we feel are necessary sometime between April and July of 2008. Your involvement in this process is requested. This is an opportunity to personally take part in mapping realistic guidelines for treating our dairy animals. A copy of the draft guidelines is available on the Web site at [www.dairywellbeing.org](http://www.dairywellbeing.org) or by contacting the MMPA office.

Since the Coalition is a relatively new group and NDAWBI is a relatively new concept for the dairy industry, let's start thinking about this topic this month and continue to develop our thoughts and viewpoints throughout the year as more information becomes available. In the meantime, enjoy this quiet time of the year when you can make plans for the busy months that really aren't as far away as they seem right now.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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