

## AGRI-VIEW

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# Prepare for animal-welfare assessment

## KATY PROUDFOOT

By now producers have likely heard of at least one animal-welfare assessment or audit, whether it's the National Dairy



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Farmers Assuring Responsible Management Program, Validus, Certified Humane or another. Those programs have become more commonplace during the past decade due to increasing interest from consumers and citizens

about how food animals are cared for.

When a producer enrolls in one of these programs, an assessor will visit the herd to evaluate the animals and the management system as a whole. Regardless of which program a producer is enrolled in, there are a few basic steps to take to prepare for such a visit.

### • Develop and show evidence of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship

All animal welfare assessment programs require evidence of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship. The easiest way to show that a relationship exists is to have a veterinarian sign a form confirming he or she provides veterinary care to the herd. Visit [www.nationaldairyfarm.com](http://www.nationaldairyfarm.com) for an example form. Once there, click on "Producer Resources/Manual and Farm Library" and scroll down to click on and print the form.

### • Update protocols with the help of a veterinarian and write them all down.

There are many aspects of management that an assessor will not see during a short visit, so he or she will ask to see the protocols and standard operating procedures, on paper. Now is also a good time to write and review farm protocols with a veterinarian to ensure they're up-to-date. Plan to review these annually. Although written protocols are not always followed, it's encouraged to make them more accessible to employees by creating a handbook in English and Spanish, or by displaying posters in obvious locations such as the milking parlor or office.

### • Develop a culture of good stockmanship, including a zero-tolerance policy for animal abuse.

Many animal-welfare assessments, including Farmers Assuring Responsible Management Program, require evidence that new employees are trained in good stockmanship, and that there is a strict, written policy against animal abuse. All employees should sign a form assuring they will not abuse cattle, and will report when they see abuse. The real difference is made when a producer can create a culture of good animal handling, which starts with the producer, and is instilled in employees beginning on the first day of work. There are a number of stockmanship training programs available online. Visit [www.dairyfarm365.com](http://www.dairyfarm365.com) for Merck's DairyCare 365.

### • Stop tail docking today

Due to the abundance of research showing that tail docking is not beneficial to cows, the practice is no longer allowed – or soon will not be allowed – by any animal-welfare assessment. If tail docking is still a practice in a herd, now is the time to replace it with an alternative practice such as switch trimming. Although the change may seem daunting, many producers have already transitioned away from tail docking and have good stories to tell.

Producers become part of animal-welfare-assessment programs for various reasons – some choose to enroll in programs to show off their exceptional animal care, whereas others are being asked to do so by their co-ops, processors or retailers. There is no reason to fear these programs or the assessors because they are a great way to show that a herd is doing well, and to help identify and prioritize improvements in animal care that will make it even better.

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