Animal Welfare - Dairy Cattle

Sustainability Snapshot

Product Description

Species-specific in-depth key performance indicators for animal welfare issues for dairy cattle.

Mission

The mission of The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) is to improve the sustainability of products when they are made, purchased, and used, with a focus on manufacturers and the retail buyers who decide what products to carry in stores. The information in this document is drawn from our detailed research on known and potential social and environmental impacts across product life cycles. TSC acknowledges that other issues exist, but we have included here those that are most relevant to the decision making of retail buying teams and manufacturers. The topics are listed alphabetically for ease of reading; the order does not represent prioritization or other criteria.

Animal Handling

Animal handlers on the farm should be properly trained in handling procedures and have knowledge of normal animal behavior, injury and disease detection, and humane cattle handling. Training regimens should be documented and may include additional training for monitoring health, proper equipment use, and newborn calf management. Improper handling may lead to animal injuries, lasting fear, and stress.

Cow-calf Management

Improper cow-calf management can lead to injury, distress, and disease for both the cow and calf. Calving areas should be kept clean and dry and caretakers should have a proficient in housing, handling, and nutritional requirements. Final product manufacturers should seek transparency into the housing conditions and training of the staff and collaborate with suppliers to ensure proper handing at the cow-calf stage.

Culling Procedures

Final product manufacturers should seek collaboration with supply chain partners to set minimum requirements for culling management at the dairy farm. Requirements should include selecting humane methods of euthanasia and confirmation of loss of conciousness and death to avoid animal pain. This also includes avoidance of transporting non-marketable animals as transporting unhealthy animals may cause the animal pain and stress.

Health Management

Animal health monitoring systems allow animal caretakers to identify and take action on diseases and injuries. Diseases and injuries may be caused by improper nutrient management, poor housing conditions, and improper handling. Final product manufacturers should collaborate with farms to ensure use of best practices in nutritional management ideal for growth, health, and maintenance and prevention of lameness and other mobility problems. Dairy farms should establish a veterinary-client-patient-relationship as it is critical to setting goals related to animal health and welfare.

Housing

An animal's health and vigor are affected by its physical environment. Cattle should be able to easily stand up, lie down, and adopt normal resting postures with visual eye contact with other cattle, given access to a lying area that provides comfort, insulation, warmth, dryness, and traction, and provided protection from heat and cold. The type of housing system should be evaluated in conjunction with other factors such as farmer management and training, climate, and genetics.

Painful Procedures

Final product manufacturers should implement a policy for suppliers to set clear requirements regarding the management of painful procedures. Requirements depend on the type of procedure but may include pain mitigation, the age and weight of the animal, skill-level of the operator, and use of equipment. If in accordance with applicable legislation, some painful procedures such as tail docking should be phased out.

Supply Chain Transparency

Addressing many of the environmental and social challenges within an agriculture supply chain requires cooperation among the many companies involved. Final product manufacturers should determine the locations of farms that produce their supply and engage in initiatives that improve transparency, communication, and data sharing.