



Dairy Cares Report

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New UC council creates opportunity for science-based dialogue on livestock care

The creation of a new University of California scientific panel to address livestock care policy issues should be welcome news to everyone participating in the discussion of proper care and treatment of food production animals.

Issues related to humane care and treatment of livestock animals are growing in interest to consumers and policy makers. Unfortunately, changing demographics in the U.S. over the last few decades have increasingly separated those who produce food and the majority of those who consume it. Nearly every Californian enjoys and depends on the many products produced by our ranchers, dairy operators and poultry, egg and pork producers, but few consumers have ever participated “hands-on” in the process of raising animals for food.

As a result, debate over animal care policy can be – and often is – founded on a lack of information on both sides. Livestock food producers don’t always know what consumers care about, or when they do know, may not fully comprehend why consumers feel the way they do. Meanwhile, consumers understand little about the process that fills their local markets with a reliable, plentiful supply of nutritious, fresh, safe and relatively inexpensive dairy products, meat, poultry and eggs.

This lack of information can lead to public policy discussions that are based more on emotion and politics than sound scientific information. That’s why the recent formation of the University of California Animal Welfare Advisory Council is welcome news. The council is made up of top-notch advisors and experts in animal care and veterinary sciences from across California, who are well-equipped to bridge the “information gap” between those who produce food and those who eat it.

The council is charged with reviewing current practices, recommending research where needed, and ultimately providing recommendations to livestock producers and policy makers for enhancing animal welfare. Productivity and cost efficiency will be included in the council’s recommendation, according to Bennie Osburn, Vice Chairman of the council and dean of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

Recognizing this growing interest in animal care and treatment issues among consumers and policy makers, members of the Dairy Cares coalition unanimously agreed earlier this year to formally include promotion of humane care and treatment of animals in our mission statement. Our member organizations understand and support the important role that the new UC Animal Welfare Advisory Council can play in this

process and are committed to engaging fully as stakeholders in the council's public process.

California dairy families have long understood the critical importance of properly caring for their animals. Dairy operators strive to provide their cows with plentiful, nutritious feed, clean water, clean and comfortable housing, freedom of movement and proper veterinary care. For decades, this has resulted in higher production and improved quality in the dairy products that are enjoyed by our consumers.

Dairy Cares members also recognize the importance of continually striving to improve. Until recently, dairy families have assumed that their consumers already knew about the many efforts they have made to assure animals are properly cared for and humanely treated. Today, there is a growing recognition that even more needs to be done to demonstrate and showcase our efforts to consumers. Therefore, we look forward to sharing information and ideas with other stakeholders via the UC Animal Welfare Advisory Council. A productive, science-based forum can only serve to further improve care and treatment of livestock animals in California, while assuring our customers that they continue to receive the finest meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products produced anywhere.

Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability for California's dairy industry. Our members include the Alliance of Western Milk Producers, Bank of the West, Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-California, Dairy Institute of California, Hilmar Cheese Co., HP Hood, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O' Lakes, Milk Producers Council, Turlock Dairy & Refrigeration, Western United Dairymen, and others. For information about Dairy Cares, visit our web site at www.dairycares.com, write dairycares@aol.com or call 916-441-3318.