



# Dairy Cares Report

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## Dairy farmers making important progress in telling story of responsible animal care

It should come as no surprise to anyone involved in animal agriculture that the discussion surrounding care, treatment and well-being of livestock animals continues to gain momentum in various media channels. Whether reported by journalists in traditional publications, or posted on the internet by bloggers, Facebookers or “Tweeters,” more and more stakeholders are talking about how food animals are treated on today’s farms.

Certainly, dairy animals are part of these discussions. Recent analysis of media monitoring trends by Dairy Cares revealed that articles addressing the topic of dairy animal welfare have increased roughly fivefold since February 2009.

Earlier this month, the dialogue on animal well-being moved from the blogosphere and print media to a symposium hosted by California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. More than 200 dairy farmers, veterinarians, academics and students assembled to hear speakers represent various points of view on the current state of livestock care and treatment.

Charged with providing a dairy farmer perspective on animal well-being were panelists Chris Durrer and Brian Fiscalini. These fourth-generation dairymen discussed their families’ commitment to provide dairy cattle proper nutrition, professional veterinary care, and housing that promotes animal health and comfort. Their stories of day-to-day efforts to care for their animals were well received, not only by the audience, but by panelists often critical of animal agriculture husbandry practices.

The stories of these two dairy farmers are not unique, nor outside the normal practices of most California dairies. Dairy families across California know that a healthy, comfortable, contented cow is also a productive cow. Dairy families provide proper care to their animals because it forms the foundation for producing high quality, safe, nutritious and affordable milk enjoyed by consumers. But proper care of animals is also the right thing to do. Fiscalini and Durrer made it clear that this basic human value is not lost to California dairy families, but in fact is a part of their ethical fabric.

We can expect consumers to continue to ask questions about the state of animal well-being on farms. As the California landscape continues to urbanize, and the separation of consumers from farm life increases (farmers account for less than 2% of the U.S. population today as

compared to 31% one hundred years ago), dairy families will be called upon to bridge the gap and continue to connect with consumers of their products by telling the story about animal care and treatment practices.

There are many efforts already underway and more to come. For example, consumers interested in the goings-on of farm life can follow California dairy farmers such as Barbara Martin, Ray Prock and Dino Giacomazzi, all leaders in communicating through social media such as Twitter and Facebook. In the course of working on their family farms, they still find time to engage with individuals and answer questions related to all aspects of dairy production. (A Google search of their names followed by the word “dairy” will direct you to their websites and/or social media pages.)

Another great source for consumers to hear firsthand from dairy farmers is the “Dairy Documentaries” produced by the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB). In coordination with CMAB, Dairy Cares recently posted three videos to its website, [www.DairyCares.com](http://www.DairyCares.com), that star real California dairy farmers, their family farms and dairy animals. Visitors can hear dairy farmers talk about the commitment they hold and efforts they undertake daily to care for not only their animals, but also the environment. The Dairy Cares website also contains photos and stories of several other California dairy families.

Finally, at the national level, major progress has been made on a rigorous program that helps farm families and milk processors work with food marketers and ultimately consumers to demonstrate that dairies everywhere are adhering to solid practices for animal health and treatment. This month, National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) and Dairy Management Inc. (DMI) announced the release of the National Dairy FARM Program: *Farmers Assuring Responsible Management*. Dairy Cares continues to monitor the development of the program and evaluate its capacity for assisting California dairy families and milk processors in further strengthening consumer confidence in California dairy products.

As the conversation on livestock care and treatment continues to evolve, Dairy Cares members remain committed to helping California dairy families successfully document and tell their animal care story. Engaging with and educating consumers about those efforts is vital to the economic future of California dairy farm families.

*Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care and treatment within the California 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-Western Area Council, Dairy Institute of California, Hilmar Cheese Co., HP Hood, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O'Lakes, Milk Producers Council, Western United Dairymen, and others. For information about Dairy Cares, visit our web site at [www.dairycares.com](http://www.dairycares.com), or call 916-441-3318.*