NYSCHAP Cattle Care Guidelines Module

The New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program (NYSCHAP) is an integrated disease prevention program in which expert advisors work with dairy and beef producers to develop health plans that are customized for their herds’ specific needs. NYSCHAP’s focus is on preventing, controlling, and treating disease to assure the health of cattle. In addition to maintaining health, NYSCHAP promotes the well-being of cattle by emphasizing guidelines for their proper care and handling. Many livestock welfare issues are being addressed nationally, such as care of non-ambulatory cattle and newborn calves. The NYSCHAP Cattle Care Guidelines Module addresses those issues and others, and provides references for information related the module’s guidelines.

As with all NYSCHAP modules, the Cattle Care Guidelines module requires the support and participation of the herd veterinarian, as well as concurrent enrollment in the NYSCHAP core module. Several issues require preparation of standard operating procedures (SOGs), and herd veterinarians will be asked to review these. As well, it is recommended that herd veterinarians sign a statement relating that they have approved the culling and injury reports to insure that injuries and deaths are appropriately addressed in the herd health plan. Producers who choose to participate in the Cattle Care Guidelines module should be dedicated to addressing the recommendations of the module, including training for any farm employees who work with cattle. Upon employment, employees should be trained in all welfare-related SOGs that are relevant to their job description or duties. As well, all employees should review SOGs on a yearly basis. More specific training should be provided to those employees who will be responsible for daily assessment of cattle for illness and injury. SOGs are recommended for care of cattle that cannot rise or walk (non-ambulatory cattle); euthanasia plans for all ages of cattle (American Association of Bovine Practitioners’ pamphlet, Practical Euthanasia of Cattle, provided by the NYSCHAP assessor); hospital animals; newborn calves; lameness; and routine/elective surgical procedures. Additionally, SOGs are recommended for daily identification of sick and injured cattle. These SOGs should include, but not be limited to, changes in behavior, activity, appetite, appearance, attitude, manure consistency, gate, and production. As well, SOGs should include presence of abnormal discharge and other monitoring efforts such as body temperature, ketosis strips, and changes in milk consistency. NYSCHAP recommends that additional written SOGs (e.g., for fresh cow monitoring, mastitis treatment flow-chart, disaster preparedness, proper handling of dead or dying animals) be established for employee training and implementation of standard practices. Adherence to NYSCHAP cattle care protocols will certainly help promote animal health and avoid many potential breaches in cattle welfare. Additionally, if a heifer raiser is used a contract should be used.

Issues addressed in the NYSCHAP Cattle Care Guidelines Module

Non-ambulatory cattle
Even under the best management programs some animals will become non-ambulatory; the NYSCHAP cattle care program recommends without exception that these animals be treated humanely and correctly. The SOG should clearly state provisions for prompt (no more than 2 hours) removal from concrete areas to a safe well-bedded area that provides for adequate footing.
Provisions must be described for feed and water without competition from other cattle; protection from self-injury and injury from other cattle; and protection from environmental conditions. Additionally, a timeframe must be specified for providing medical intervention, veterinary consultation when necessary, and timely euthanasia decisions. NYSCHAP recommends that farms have culling plans in place to decrease the occurrence of non-ambulatory cattle. The plans should include guidelines to assess the likelihood of recovery prior to initiating treatments that typically require prolonged withdrawal times. In some cases it will be necessary to transport non-ambulatory cattle in order to insure adequate care. An appropriate sledding device, sling, or bucket must be used when cattle are moved more than 10 feet. Cattle should be moved with as little discomfort as possible. If necessary, cattle should be humanely euthanized prior to movement. Dragging is not acceptable; exceptions can be made only when absolutely unavoidable and for distances less than 10 feet. Plenty of bedding should be placed under the animal to minimize discomfort. All provisions for transporting cattle should be detailed in an SOG.

**Euthanasia**

Euthanasia is an activity that may be required to end the pain and suffering of cattle and must be accomplished in a humane manner. The SOG for decisions regarding euthanasia needs to weigh many factors including pain and distress of the animal; likelihood of recovery; ability to get to feed and water; medications used on the cattle; drug withdrawal time; diagnostic information; condemnation potential; and economics. Each farm’s euthanasia action plan must address animals of all age groups on the farm. The plan might simply be ‘call the veterinarian to euthanize animals.’ Approved methods and protocols should be adhered to as outlined in ‘Practical Euthanasia of Cattle’ produced by the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (http://www.aabp.org/resources/euth.pdf).

**Hospital/Special Needs Cattle**

Cattle that are sick or injured need special care. Sick or injured cattle must, without exception, have continual access to feed and water without competition from healthy cattle. NYSCHAP recommends that these animals be segregated from the herd. Timely decision making for treatment, culling, or euthanasia must be based on monitoring for recovery potential; deterioration; uncontrollable pain; locomotion; and body condition score. Criteria for these decisions should be included in the SOG. Written protocols should be developed for assessment and routine treatments under supervision and training of the herd veterinarian. Protocols must include guidelines for when to call a veterinarian for individual animal care. SOGs also must address criteria for supportive care of cull cattle when transport is necessarily delayed.

**Care of Newborn Calves**

Newborn calves are the most susceptible group of cattle to disease, injury, and weather stress. Therefore, calves need special and immediate attention to get a good start on life. Heifer and bull calves must be fed appropriate colostrum within 6 hours of life. Neglect of bull calves is unacceptable. Calves need a dry and clean environment that provides shelter from environmental conditions including moisture, temperature, wind, and sun. When transporting calves to an off-site facility calves must be dry; able to walk and stand without assistance; protected from extreme weather conditions in a clean and disinfected vehicle in good repair; and handled gently when loading and unloading. Calves that are awaiting transport to market
must be fed at least every 12 hours.

**Lameness**
Lameness is a concern in welfare programs and can happen for many different reasons. SOGs for lameness should include a management system for early detection and effective, prompt treatment. Factors contributing to lameness include facilities, infectious disease, nutrition, genetics, and employee training. These should all be assessed on the farm and management practices implemented to minimize new occurrences. Our recommendation is no more than 15% of animals in each animal management group will have a locomotion score of 3, 4 or 5 using the lameness scoring system created by Sprecher and published by Zinpro.

**Hygiene**
Cattle housing facilities must contribute to clean and dry hair coats. Clean, comfortable facilities result in cleaner cows; in turn, hygiene scores are used as one measure in evaluating facilities. Our assessments use a scoring system devised by N.B. Cook (2002, www.vetmed.wisc.edu/dms/fapm/fapmtools/4hygiene/hygiene.pdf) to assess the cleanliness of cattle. In tie-stall operations all cattle can be scored in all animal management groups with the following goals:
- Lower leg: 75% of cattle have a hygiene score <3
- Udder: 80% of cattle have a hygiene score <3
- Flank and upper leg: 70% of cattle have a hygiene score <3
In loose housing all animals or a subset of animals in each management group depending on size and facilities can be scored with the following goals:
- Lower leg: 40% of cattle have a hygiene score <3
- Udder: 80% of cattle have a hygiene score <3
- Flank and upper leg: 80% of cattle have a hygiene score <3

**Body Condition Score**
Body condition scores reflect the feeding program on the farm, including ration balancing for physiological state and physical feeding facilities. All cattle must have continual access to clean water and receive a wholesome diet that is nutritionally adequate. Our assessment goal is 90% of each animal-management group over 12 months of age have a body condition score of 2 or more.

**Facilities**
All facilities should be maintained in good repair to avoid discomfort, distress, and injury. Facilities must provide sufficient protection from wind, temperature extremes, moisture, and sun. Non-slip flooring must be provided and maintained to ensure that cattle do not slip or fall. Handling and restraint facilities must be appropriate for management procedures and be maintained to avoid injury and discomfort for the animals. Housing circumstances, including overcrowding, that affect cattle welfare will be evaluated by monitoring locomotion scores, hygiene scores, and body condition scores using the standards covered earlier in this brochure. Facilities that do not meet the welfare recommendations of cattle result in increased lameness, an increased number of dirty cattle, and an increase in cattle do not have an appropriate body condition score.
**Cattle Movement and Handling**

All animals on a dairy farm should be handled in a calm, quiet, and gentle manner. Managers of farms must not tolerate any acts of abuse or mistreatment. Employees must know the consequences for such action, and NYSCHAP recommends that all farms provide their personnel with written documentation of those consequences. Farm personnel should be trained and evaluated regularly in movement and handling of cattle. Facilities should in no way impede the calm movement of cattle. Considerations include lighting, shadows, non-slip floors, gates, and corrals. These factors must be assessed regularly. Prods, canes, and other extreme methods for moving cattle are rarely necessary and should only be used when the situation is critical to human safety or cattle health and well-being. When present, crowd gates should be designed and used to allow for normal cattle response and movement, and farm personnel utilizing these gates should have training and regular evaluation.

**Routine and elective surgical procedures**

Any routine or elective surgical procedures, including dehorning, castration, teat removal, identification, and tail docking, must be performed by trained personnel, under acceptable sanitary conditions in consultation with a veterinarian. In all cases these procedures should be performed on appropriately aged animals. NYSCHAP recommends the following guidelines:

1. **Castration**
   - Closed castration of bull calves should be performed before two months of age.
   - Castration of older bulls or open castration procedures should be performed with the use of anesthetic/analgesic in consultation with a veterinarian.

2. **Dehorning**
   - Dairy calves should be routinely dehorned before two months of age.
   - Anesthesia/analgesia should be used any time dehorning is performed.

3. **Teat removal**
   - Should be performed at the youngest age that supernumerary teats can be detected.

4. **Tail Docking**
   - Published studies provide no evidence that tail docking impacts cattle health or hygiene. The practice does improve the work environment for milkers, and has become a popular management practice within some sectors of the dairy industry. The decision to dock cattle tails must also include other environmental management considerations including the implementation of procedures to enhance fly monitoring and control. If tail docking is practiced in a particular facility, it should be done in a humane manner under the direction and training of the herd veterinarian. An SOG must be developed and be available to farm personnel.

**How to Enroll in NSYCHAP**

To enroll in NYSCHAP, contact your herd veterinarian and ask to make arrangements with the regional field veterinarian from the Department of Agriculture & Markets. For additional information, contact one of the sources below. To enroll or contact a state field veterinarian, call the New York State Division of Animal Industry, 518-457-3502. For general information, call the NYSCHAP coordinator, 585-313-7541.

Visit the NYSCHAP website at: nyschap.vet.cornell.edu