

TENNESSEE



DAIRY NEWS

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New USDA Rules Will Affect Cull Cattle Sales

Kristy M. Hill, Extension Area Dairy Specialist

Dairy farmers may need to take their cull cows to their local livestock market sooner than they would have in the past. The new USDA rules, aimed at protecting consumers, state that non-ambulatory disabled cattle, better known as “downers,” cannot be used for human food. However, the definition of a downer cow isn’t clear. Most of us would call one that cannot rise or cannot walk a downer. But lame, weak or sick cattle arriving at the livestock market might be classified in this category. Market owners have always had the right to refuse any animals that could not walk, and many have not accepted downers in years. But livestock center owners must decide if a lame, weak or otherwise sick animal is strong enough to walk off the truck and across the kill floor. According to Jennifer Houston with the East Tennessee Livestock Center in Sweetwater, they will accept an animal that is walking, even if it appears weak, lame or ill. However, producers must realize that buyers are no longer willing to take the same chances they did in the past. Some animals may have no value. Houston urges dairy producers wanting a reasonable salvage value to cull cows a few weeks sooner than in the past when the animals are stronger.

What will the new USDA rules mean to dairy producers in Tennessee? First and most important, culling decisions will need to be made earlier. Producers can no longer wait until their cows are on their last legs to take them to market. Second, the salvage value of poorly conditioned cull animals is likely to decline. Buyers may not be willing to take chances on culls that appear weak or are lame. Without a suitable market for these animals, more animals might have to be euthanized on the farm. This will likely increase the on-farm death rate, which is already nearing 10 percent in Tennessee. In the end, the total cost for disposing of cull cattle will rise as well. Additionally, in the new USDA rules, downer cattle cannot be used for edible rendering. So, if your normal practice

is to take downed or dead stock to a rendering plant, you should check on their rules prior to making the trip. Some will no longer accept these banned animals, while other plants may have the capability to render for the inedible market.

Abbreviated Version of Rules on Downer Cattle and Feed

1. Non-ambulatory disabled cattle cannot be used for human food, including edible rendering.
2. Feeding of poultry litter to ruminant animals is banned because some poultry companies use ruminant meat and bone meal in poultry diets. Feed spillage could contaminate the litter.
3. Mixed enterprises that feed ruminants and non-ruminants (typically dairy and poultry) must have separate equipment for mixing and handling feed ***IF*** banned products are fed to non-ruminants. This is to reduce possible contamination of ruminant feed.
4. The feeding of restaurant “plate waste” to ruminant animals is banned.
5. The use of cattle-derived blood and blood products in feed for ruminants is banned. Blood products from swine are still approved for use as a feed ingredient for cattle.

Other Concerns

1. At this time, it is legal to feed whey and whey products to cattle because milk does not transmit the BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) causing agents. However, consumer advocacy groups are increasing pressure on the FDA and USDA to ban this practice.
2. At this time, it is legal to feed non-ruminant meat, bone and blood by-products to ruminant animals. Consumer advocacy groups are increasing pressure on the FDA and USDA to ban this practice as well.
3. Some producers use salvaged pet food as a dietary ingredient. Changes could be made in the processing of pet food in which ruminant meat and bone products could be banned. Additionally, there is discussion on making pet

food companies label products with ruminant meat and bone ingredients as unsuitable for cattle. As a precaution, we do not recommend the feeding of any salvaged pet food to ruminant animals at this time.

4. If bans are placed on the feeding of whey, whey products and non-ruminant by-products, consumer advocacy groups will likely target the feeding of bakery waste or candy waste because the oil used to cook these products may come from the rendering industry and may contain milk products.

Reducing the Incidence of Non-ambulatory Dairy Cows

Gary Rogers, Dairy Extension Leader

One of the goals of every dairy producer is to have healthy cows that produce a lot of milk efficiently. But that goal is not always a reality, especially when looking at individual cows. The ban on non-ambulatory cattle in the human food supply and the restrictions on rendering will ultimately affect dairy producers' culling decisions. For most Tennessee dairy producers, the top five reasons for culling cows are 1) disease or injury, 2) reproductive problems, 3) mastitis, 4) low production and 5) lameness/feet and legs. And let's face it, the overall health status of an animal plays a part in all of these reasons. The possibility of "sick" cows being rejected at the market means producers need to look at their management practices and intervene in situations sooner — ultimately reducing the number of "sick" cows and downer cows. Your goal should be to make culling decisions based on production and management reasons rather than as a necessity.

The following tips could help reduce the number of non-ambulatory cows:

1. Maintain a well-balanced ration and especially encourage adequate dry matter intake in transition cows and recently fresh cows. Work to minimize metabolic disorders. Observe cows regularly during the transition period and segregate any cows to a comfortable area where they can easily lie down or move around on their own. Keep cows in good body condition. Cows that are too fat will have reduced dry matter intake right after calving.

2. Utilize calving ease sires, especially in heifers, to reduce dystocia. Consider using Jersey AI bulls or Scandinavian Red AI bulls on Holstein heifers.

3. Do not get heifers too fat at calving but make sure they are adequately grown for calving. A body condition score of 3.5 is probably ideal. Body condition scores of 4.0 or above indicate heifers are too fat and can result in calving problems.

4. Use care in assisting cows having distressed labor. Careful use of calf pullers is essential. Make sure cows do

not lie too long in one position at calving. Do not intervene in calving too quickly.

5. Groove or otherwise make concrete surfaces less slippery. Try to keep concrete areas as dry as possible. Consider using rubber in high traffic areas. Create traffic movement areas that have limited sharp turns.

6. Try to provide cows access to dirt or vegetative lots or pasture as much as possible. Cows on pasture much of the time have fewer health problems. Pure pasture systems like those in New Zealand have cows that survive twice as long as dairy cows in conventional systems.

7. Keep hooves of dairy cattle in good shape by trimming and proper ration balancing. Be diligent with cows starting to develop a hoof problem. Do not assume that the problem will cure itself in a few days. Pay particular attention to fiber in the ration. Minimize the use of byproduct feeds that have low fiber content and produce acidosis. Include 2 or more pounds of long stem hay per cow per day in total mixed rations.

8. Let yearling heifers have access to concrete areas so they can learn to move on concrete before they calve for the first time. Prior experience on concrete surfaces helps heifers adapt when they calve. Heifers can be easily injured if they are thrust onto concrete surfaces with swollen udders. Dominant cows can also injure new heifers more easily if they are not familiar with concrete.

9. Ensure that recently fresh cows are housed in areas with good footing and where competition for feed and water is reduced. Loose housing may be desirable for recently fresh cows if the loose housing environment is well maintained.

10. Use handling methods that allow cows to move methodically with little excitement. Avoid "frightening" cows or abusing cows to get them to move rapidly. Be patient when handling or moving cows.

11. In the long run, breed for cattle that have improved longevity. Select for improved health, calving ease, improved feet and increased productive life. Use good AI bulls that are selected to improve these traits. Consider using good AI bulls in a crossbreeding program. Crossbreeding programs could involve using selected AI bulls from Holstein, Jersey, Brown Swiss and Scandinavian breeds in a rotation. In New Zealand, crossbred cows stay in the herd for one more lactation than their purebred contemporaries.

12. Keep facilities, dry lots and pastures in safe condition. Remove any objects or repair any areas that might injure cows. Inspect cattle housing areas and heavy use areas regularly.

13. Remove high-risk cows from the herd before they become non-ambulatory. Cows with digestive diseases can sometimes be sold before they become non-ambulatory. Older cows that have had previous metabolic problems but recovered may be good candidates for culling.

National Animal ID to Become a Reality

Kristy M. Hill, Extension Area Dairy Specialist

Before the first U.S. case of BSE, a national animal identification program had already been discussed and debated for some time. Producers, industry personnel and politicians were straddling the fence on whether the tremendous undertaking was a necessity. Now that the disease has appeared in the U.S., a national program will become a reality, and planning has been put on the fast track. Most now see the importance of being able to track an animal from birth to slaughter. Actually, the U.S. is behind the times when it comes to a national identification system. New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, 15 countries in the European Union as well as Canada have implemented a mandatory national animal identification system. Other countries are considering a voluntary system.

The goal of the United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) is to achieve a "traceback system that can identify all animals and premises potentially exposed to an animal with a Foreign Animal Disease (FAD) within 48 hours after discovery." The public input stage of the plan's development process has just ended, and the final document is expected to be made public soon. The targets of the USAIP are bison, beef cattle, dairy cattle, swine, sheep, goats, alpacas, llamas, horses, deer, elk, eight species of poultry (including game birds), and eleven species of fish. The proposal is to implement mandatory national identification of these animals over the next 2 years.

The first phase of the plan calls for premise identification by July 2004. A "premise" can be thought of as a location that manages and/or holds any of the target animals. The second phase of the plan has two parts: (1) identification of individual animals that are shipped from state to state by July 2005 and (2) identification of individual animals shipped within state commerce by July 2005. The third phase of the USAIP is called "enhanced tracking" and involves radio frequency identification at markets and slaughter.

There is no doubt that some type of national identification system will occur over the next year. However, at this time, the details are still being ironed out. As soon as a final plan is released, information will be sent to your county Extension agent.

Dates to Remember

Producer Calendar

- 3/2 2004 Kentucky Dairy Conference in Cave City, Kentucky. For more info: 859-257-7542.
- 3/18 Cumberland County Dairy Meeting in Crossville. For more info: 931-484-6743.
- 3/18 Alabama Dairy Field Day in Philcampbell, Alabama. For more info: 256-332-8880 or <http://www.aces.edu/dept/extcomm/newspaper/jan30a04.html>.
- 3/20 University of Tennessee's Annual Dairy Day Sale in Knoxville. For more info: 865-974-7289.
- 3/22 - 3/23 Management Essentials for Dairy Success in State College, Pennsylvania. For more info: 1-888-373-7232 or www.dairyalliance.org.
- 3/31 - 4/3 8th National Dairy Calf and Heifer Conference in Roanoke, Virginia. For more info: 877-434-3377 or <http://www.pdhga.org>.
- 6/2 June Dairy Month Kickoff Luncheon at Ellington Center in Nashville. For more info: 1-800-928-6455.

Youth Calendar

For more information on any of these youth events, see your county 4-H agent or our Web site at http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu/dairy/dairy_4-H.htm.

- 3/6 Block & Bridle's Round-Up Livestock and Dairy Judging Clinics and Contests (serving as the East Tennessee Regional FFA Dairy Judging Contest this year). For more info see <http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu/news/RoundUp.htm>.
- 3/20 University of Tennessee's Annual Dairy Day Sale in Knoxville. For more info: 865-974-7289.
- 5/7 June Dairy Month Poster Contest Deadline.

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<i>Youth Calendar continued</i>			
6/2	State Dairy Quiz Bowl and June Dairy Month Kick-off Luncheon at Ellington Center in Nashville.	9/13	Cumberland District Junior Dairy Show at the Warren County Fair in McMinnville.
7/1	Transfer Deadline for Show Cattle and Tennessee Dairy Cattle Lease Agreement Deadline.	9/14	Western District Junior Dairy Show and the Western District Dairy Judging Contest at the West Tennessee State Fair in Jackson.
8/1	District and State Show Entry Deadline.	9/16	State Dairy Judging Contest at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds in Nashville.
9/11	Smoky Mountain District Junior Dairy Show and the Smoky Mountain District Dairy Judging Contest at the Tennessee Valley Fair in Knoxville.	9/18	Central District Junior Dairy Show at the Tennessee State Fair in Nashville.
		10/6 - 10/9	Tennessee Dairy Expo and Tennessee State Junior Dairy Show in Murfreesboro.

The Tennessee Dairy News is published three to four times a year and is available on the UT Animal Science Web page at <http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu/>. If you would prefer to receive the Tennessee Dairy News via e-mail, please subscribe to Joan Cooper at jcooper9@utk.edu.

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