



Dairy welfare, we care
Animal husbandry survey 2014

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Cows are the livelihood of Australia's dairy farmers. Their health and wellbeing are essential to the success of every dairy farming business. Farmers have a proven commitment to their herd and the animal husbandry practices on every farm demonstrate this.

The dairy industry has a commitment to ensure "every dairy animal is well cared for". This is underpinned by the National Dairy Industry Animal Welfare Strategy, which promotes and fosters responsible animal husbandry among dairy farmers.

The new Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle¹ reflect the industry strategy and recommended practices. The Standards are essential legal requirements that must be met by all dairy farmers, covering the full range of on-farm management practices for cows, and their welfare considerations. The dairy industry has always had a strong commitment to animal welfare, and most dairy farmers are already exceeding the requirements of the Standards.

All Australian dairy farmers participate in farm assurance programs - the food safety elements of these programs are audited to ensure compliance with mandatory food safety legislation. Animal welfare outcomes are included in these programs. To deliver safe, high quality dairy products, dairy farmers must practice sound animal husbandry and keep their animals in peak condition.

Animal welfare practices underpin the reputation and integrity of the dairy industry. As part of the Strategy, an Animal Husbandry Survey has been conducted by Dairy Australia since 2005 to monitor and evaluate animal health and welfare practices. The data gathered is used to identify where the industry requires more support and information, as well as to track the uptake of recommended practices.

Methodology

Data was collected through 400 telephone interviews with a random sample of dairy farmers. Issues covered by the 2014 survey include:

- › Disbudding calves in preference to dehorning older stock
- › Management of bobby calves, particularly in regards to transporting and managing antibiotic treatments where given
- › Calving induction
- › Tail docking
- › Lameness
- › Downer cows
- › Herd nutrition programs and monitoring
- › Disease risk management and biosecurity
- › Staff training in the above areas
- › Awareness of industry standards

Highlights

The results from the 2014 survey highlight the many significant improvements being made on dairy farms in key areas. However, as an industry we acknowledge there are areas where further improvement is required. Practice change takes time and the industry will continue to work to achieve this change to meet the expectations of all industry, the community and consumers, on how livestock are treated on Australian dairy farms.

Despite the delay in introducing legislation for the new Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines, 56% of dairy farmers were aware of them.

Training in animal health and welfare is now provided on 83% of Australian dairy farms.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of dairy farms now disbud all their calves prior to two months of age.

The number of cows induced as a management tool has almost halved since the 2012 survey.

The number of Australian dairy farmers that do not dock the tails of their cows has risen to 87%.

Almost all farms (95%) have a lameness prevention strategy in place.

Water troughs are in all paddocks that cows graze on 94% of farms.

On 97% of farms the herd nutrition program is monitored by body condition scoring or another system

The Australian dairy industry vision for animal welfare is that "every dairy animal is well cared for". Every two years, the Animal Husbandry Survey is undertaken to monitor and evaluate animal husbandry performance, and to track the uptake of recommended practices by dairy farmers.

¹ These are expected to be endorsed in 2015. Following endorsement they will need to be implemented through State and Territory regulation, and they will replace the Codes of Practice for Cattle that previously operated at a State and Territory level.

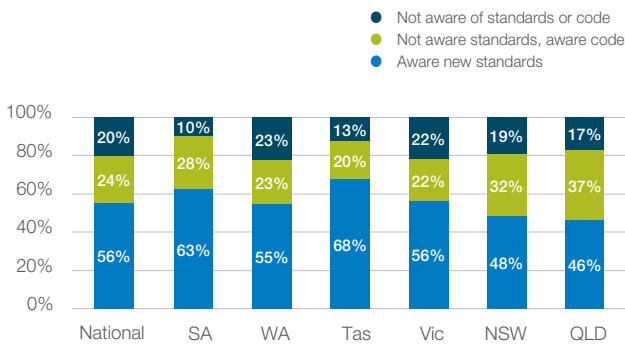
Farm management

Dairy farmers are aware of their responsibilities for the care of their animals and are supportive of the need for documented guidelines and protocols to ensure good animal welfare outcomes. Awareness of the new Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines is already quite widespread and this proportion will grow substantially with further communications when the Standards are endorsed and incorporated in legislation.

Awareness of Standards and Guidelines

- › Although the new recommended Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines were only finalised a few months before the survey, 56% of dairy farmers interviewed were already aware of them.
- › Eight out of 10 farmers were either aware of the new Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines or the Code of Practice, which the Standards and Guidelines will replace.

Graph 1 Farmer awareness of standards/code



Base: all respondents

Industry goals

All farmers as a minimum adhere to animal welfare legislation and standards.

All farmers implement industry recommended animal husbandry practices.

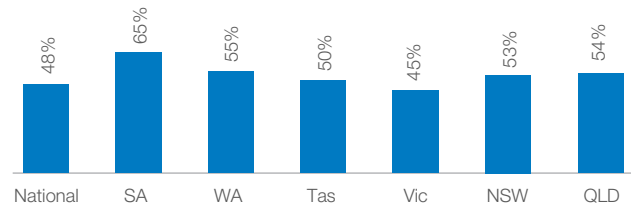
Priority actions

Manufacturers will continue to promote the Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines in on-farm QA Programs and company communications. Dairy Australia will promote them through continuing extension and animal husbandry training in conjunction with the National Centre for Dairy Education and Regional Development Programs

Training

- › Farms (with at least one staff member) who provide training on animal health and welfare practices rose to 83% in 2014 from 73% in 2012.
- › Training is more likely to be provided on larger farms, and farmers with medium-sized herds (150 to 300 cows) offering training has risen from 69% in 2012 to 85% in 2014.
- › When unprompted only 48% of farmers recalled having documented guidance or instructions on animal care policy compared to 60% in 2012 when this was a prompted question

Graph 2 Percentage of farmers with animal welfare policy in place



Base: all respondents

Industry goals

All farmers have training protocols and procedures for handling and management of dairy cattle, including calves.

Priority actions

The industry will continue training and extension in animal husbandry including initiatives in nutrition, mastitis control, reproductive management, farm risk management, calf management and rearing, and lameness. These are delivered through the National Centre for Dairy Education, Regional Development Programs and education materials accessible via the Dairy Australia website.

Cow management

Australian dairy farmers recognise that to deliver safe, high quality dairy products, they must practise sound animal husbandry and keep their animals in peak condition. In particular the industry has identified five priority areas – tail docking, disbudding, calving induction, lameness and calf management – for on-going focus and has set specific goals for these areas.

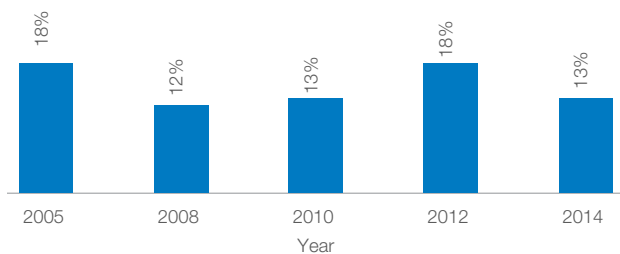
Tail docking

The Australian dairy industry supports the banning of tail docking unless it is to treat injury or disease. The new Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle will restrict tail docking only on veterinary advice and only to treat injury.

Tail docking of cattle is prohibited in some Australian states, except when undertaken by a veterinarian. In other jurisdictions the procedure is governed by the Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Cattle.

- › The level of tail docking for management purposes has fallen from 18% in 2012 to 13% in 2014.
- › There has been a significant fall in farms tail docking in western Victoria (down from 36% in 2012 to 13% in 2014) and in Tasmania (down from 38% to 20%).
- › Among the dairy farmers still docking tails, almost half (49%) are aware the incoming Animal Welfare Standards will ban this practice except to treat injury.

Graph 3 Percentage of farmers docking tails



Base: all respondents

Industry goals

Tail docking is only undertaken to treat for injury or disease, under the recommendation of a vet.

Priority actions

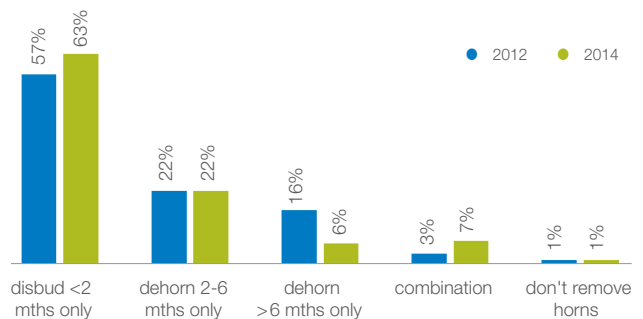
The dairy industry has supported legislation to ban tail docking under the new Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle and will ensure all dairy farmers are aware of the requirements.

Disbudding

The Australian dairy industry supports the practice of disbudding calves at an early age rather than dehorning cattle at an older age. Best practice of disbudding calves prior to two months of age is promoted by industry.

- › An increasing number of farms disbud all calves before reaching two months of age, with 63% of farms having adopted the practice, up from 57% in 2012.
- › The number of farms dehorning stock older than six months continues to fall, with only 10% of farms continuing the practice.
- › Every dairy region has seen a decrease in the number of farms dehorning stock.
- › More than half of all farms (56%) are using professional contractors to disbud or dehorn stock.

Graph 4 Horn removal method



Base: all respondents

Industry goals

All farmers disbud calves by eight weeks

All farmers have access to practical pain management options. All farmers have access to semen from polled bulls for use in breeding programs

Priority actions

Dairy Australia will continue to promote guidelines for disbudding of calves, and the recommendation that all farmers disbud calves by two months of age. Introduction of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle will continue to provide opportunities for the dairy industry to promote nationally agreed standards for the removal of horns from cattle. Details of naturally polled sires available for artificial insemination will be included in information provided by the Australian Dairy Herd Improvement Scheme.

Calving induction

The Australian dairy industry recognises the animal welfare concerns associated with calving induction and is committed to phasing-out the practice of routinely inducing cows using improved herd management practices, tools and technology.

- › Across Australia, 81% of dairy farmers do not use calving induction as a farm management tool.
- › Only 1.3% of the national herd has been induced over the past year – this is almost half the numbers induced compared to 2012.
- › The fall in numbers of cows induced shows industry focus on exploring alternative options is having impact.

Industry goals

Routine calving induction is not conducted except when an exemption is granted for circumstances beyond the farmer's control.

Priority actions

The dairy industry will support the implementation of the Australian Cattle Veterinarians guidelines on calving induction including the requirement for implementation of structured fertility management programs in herds where induction is proposed. Annual limits for routine calving induction will be established for the proportion of cows that may be induced without a special exemption. Unplanned late inductions which provide no benefit to future seasonal fertility are to be discontinued. Dairy Australia will continue to educate farmers on improved reproductive management, in particular through the InCalf and Repro Right program, thereby reducing the need for induction. The industry is also investing ongoing research in genetic improvement and fertility management to achieve long term improvement in herd fertility

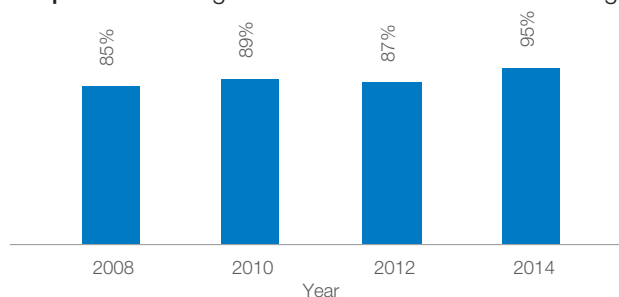
Lameness

The dairy industry is working hard to minimise lameness through the adoption of practices to prevent, detect and treat cases on farms.

Farmers recognise that prevention and prompt and effective treatment of lameness promotes good production and welfare of their cows. Lameness prevention strategies are considered mandatory on most farms.

- › Some 95% of farms have a lameness strategy – the highest recorded since 2008.
- › Most of the strategies implemented are similar to 2012 such as, maintaining laneways and moving cows at reasonable pace. There has been a significant increase in the number of farms trimming hooves to prevent lameness.
- › Overall 40% of dairy farmers have attended Dairy Australia's Healthy Hooves workshops and/or accessed lameness extension materials.

Graph 5 Percentage of farmers with a lameness strategy



Base: all respondents, unprompted

Industry goals

All farmers have lameness prevention and treatment strategies in place.

Priority actions

Dairy Australia will continue to work with service providers including vets and Regional Development Programs to ensure farmers have access to programs to manage lameness in dairy cows. These include the industry extension program Cowtime which promotes good practices in the handling of cattle to reduce the risk of lameness; and the Healthy Hooves workshops which provide information to dairy farmers on the prevention, early detection and treatment of lameness on farms.

Downer cows

The term 'downer cow' applies to any late pregnant or recently-calved cow that is lying down and unable to rise for 24 hours or more. The majority of farmers have a clearly defined approach in getting these animals back on their feet as quickly as possible.

- › Nine out of 10 dairy farmers have had at least one downer cow over the past year.
- › Downer cows were checked every 8 hours or more frequently on 69% of farms which reported having downer cows.
- › Downer cows are nursed in a dedicated area on 58% of farms and another 18% provide shelter which is slightly higher than in 2012.

Industry goals

All farmers ensure sick or injured cows are treated or humanely euthanased as soon as possible.

Priority actions

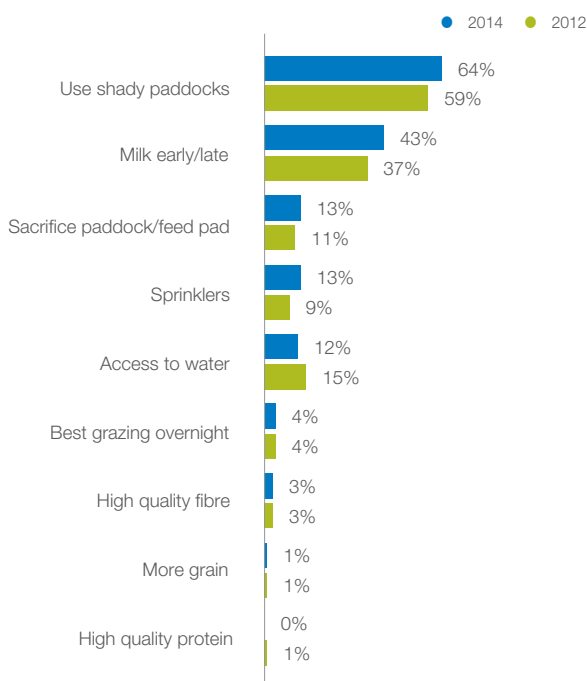
Dairy Australia will continue to work with service providers and vets to ensure farmers have access to information on downer cows, and support for their assessment and care. Workshops on the management and nursing of downer cows are being provided by Regional Development Programs.

Managing cows in hot weather

Heat stress affects herd milk production and income in that its impacts on cow fertility, health and welfare last well beyond seasonal hot weather. The Dairy Australia Cool Cows program provides farmers with tools and information on practices to minimise the risk of heat stress.

- › Nine out of 10 dairy farms have infrastructure to keep cows cool.
- › More farms have infrastructure to keep cows cool in paddocks (up from 82% in 2012 to 86%) and in dairy yards (up from 44% to 55%).
- › Water troughs are in all paddocks that cows graze on 94% of farms compared to 83% of farms in 2012.

Graph 6 Percentage of farmers making changes on farm to help in hot weather



Base: all respondents

Industry goal

All farmers manage their herd to minimise the effects of heat stress.

Priority actions

Dairy Australia will promote the resources and latest information available from the Cool Cows research project to provide farmers with advice and innovative tools for an integrated year-round approach to managing heat stress.

Calf management

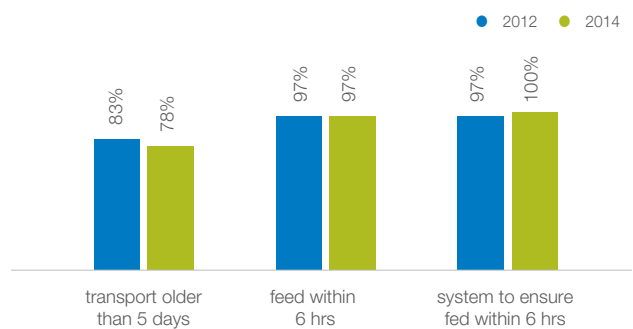
Calves are an integral part of dairy farming and must be managed with care.

The dairy industry is committed to ensuring all farmers adopt sound animal husbandry practices and management systems to deliver good animal welfare for calves, whether they are destined for the milking herd, reared for dairy beef, or marketed for veal.

Transporting calves

- › Calves less than 30 days of age are sold or transported by 84% of farmers.
- › On 42% of farms the calves are transported by the farmer.
- › Almost all farms (97%) selling calves ensure they are fed within six hours of transport – the average time is 2.6 hours.

Graph 7 Transporting calves



Base: sell calves

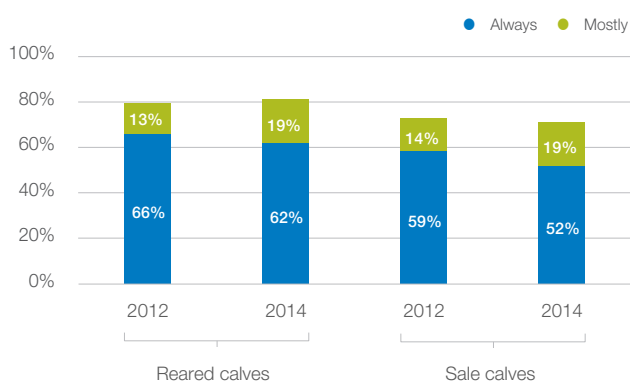
Managing antibiotic residues in calves

- › Antibiotic residues in calves are rare according to the Australian National Residue Survey.
- › Farmers rearing calves for sale who treat sick calves with antibiotics has risen from 33% in 2012 to 41% in 2014.
- › All farms administering antibiotics to sale calves undertake at least one, and on average three, activities to manage withholding periods.
- › Almost all farmers who sell calves (97%) implement at least one strategy to minimise the risk of cross contamination from antibiotics (up from 93% in 2012).

Provision of additional colostrum

- › Dairy farmers are clearly aware of the benefits associated with ensuring calves receive colostrum.
- › Almost two-thirds of farmers (62%) always provide additional colostrum to their calves being reared.
- › Farmers with very large herds are the most likely to say they always provide colostrum to calves being reared and calves for sale.

Graph 8 Providing additional colostrum to calves



Base: respondents rearing/selling

Industry goals

All farmers adhere to standards and agreed industry practices for the management of their calves

All people handling and transporting calves for sale or slaughter adhere to animal welfare standards.

Priority actions

Dairy Australia will continue to provide information to support farmers in caring for calves including the Healthy Calves program. The dairy industry will continue to work with other sectors involved in the care and transport of bobby calves to support systems that assist all parties to fulfil their animal welfare responsibilities. This work will be delivered in cooperation with the National Centre for Dairy Education, the National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council and Regional Development Programs through workshops and formal competencies for farmers, transporters and abattoir workers.

Disease management

Dairy farmers recognise that risk management and biosecurity are essential to minimise the risk of disease spread in their herds. To this end, they institute a range of on-farm management practices that support good animal welfare outcomes. Survey results reveal that more dairy farmers are bringing in stock increasing the importance of good risk management practices.

Livestock purchased

One-third of all dairy farms have closed herds while 67% buy in stock on occasion. Bulls are introduced on 47% of farms and milking cows on 29%.

Among those that buy in cattle, 77% always inspect stock before it is purchased or introduced to the farm. This figure has risen from 68% in 2012.

The number of farmers that check the health of the property where cattle are purchased from has risen to 54% from 50% in 2012.

Almost all farmers who buy in stock vaccinate against disease.

Farmers' recall of testing introduced animals was poor but on prompting 43% tested for mycoplasma mastitis and 17% tested for Strep agalactiae.

Disease risk management

More farms are undertaking some form of visitor risk management (68% up from 62% in 2012).

More than half (55%) of all dairy farms now have washing facilities and sanitisers for visitors and ensure they are used.

The number of farmers ensuring protective equipment is worn and clean has risen to 40% from 31% in 2012.

BJD risk management

Awareness of the 3 Step Calf Plan, which minimises the risk of calves being exposed to diseases from adult stock, has risen significantly from 63% in 2012 to 72%.

Almost half of farms (52%) check Dairy Score prior to introducing stock (up from 45% in 2012).

Industry goals

To minimise contamination of farms and farm products by *M. paratuberculosis*

To protect non-infected herds whilst minimising disruption to trade.

To minimise social, economic and trade impact.

Priority actions

The dairy industry will continue to promote the importance of biosecurity measures to dairy farmers to minimise the risks to their business by limiting the likelihood of introducing and spreading animal diseases, weeds and pests. Early detection and investigation of suspect new diseases provides the best opportunity to minimise impact and losses to individual farmers and the wider industry.

Dairy Australia will continue to work with vets and service providers to improve risk assessment and management advice on Bovine Johnes Disease and other endemic diseases including facial eczema. Research will be undertaken to develop improved control options for other infectious diseases including pestivirus and mycoplasma infections.



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Your Levy at Work

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