



**2019 GRI ISSUE BRIEF**

# **ANIMAL WELFARE**





## GRI ISSUE BRIEF

# ANIMAL WELFARE

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO US

Tillamook County Creamery Association (TCCA) is a farmer-owned and farmer-led cooperative that includes approximately 80 farming families in Tillamook County. These dairy farmers provide high-quality milk and benefit directly from the cooperative's growth and success. Nearly two decades ago, we outgrew the milk supply in Tillamook County in serving the customer and consumer demand for our products. We also started reaching production capacity at our flagship cheese and ice cream manufacturing facility in Tillamook.

That's when we made the intentional decision to expand our supply chain to source milk from suppliers who share our same values, standards and animal welfare practices, but operate outside of Tillamook County. That growth supports more than 900 TCCA employees, our farmer-owners, other dairy farmers across the country and has also enabled us to invest millions of dollars back into our communities to help them thrive. So, while we are growing beyond Tillamook County's geographic borders, we are doing so in a way that enables us to bring more high-quality dairy products to more people responsibly.

All the farmers who supply milk for our wholesome products have a commitment to quality, which translates to good cow care. Healthful cows produce high-quality dairy products; they are central to our business and our lives. We take care of them, and they take care of us. We expect our farmer-owners and the rest of our milk suppliers to abide by the same TCCA values and care for their animals.

“

Animal welfare is an important issue to Kroger and our stakeholders, including customers, associates and investors. It is something we take seriously, and work to uphold in our supply chain.”

**LISA ZWACK**

Head of Sustainability, The Kroger Co.

“

Animal welfare is a top priority. Activists are using undercover video & social media to damage brands. Consumers are asking food retailers about the treatment of animals used to produce products.”

**JAMIE JONKER**

VP, Sustainability & Scientific Affairs, National Milk Producers Federation

### MANAGEMENT APPROACH

**Stewardship Charter:** At TCCA, we uphold our tradition of doing things right by committing to a business model rooted in Stewardship. In 2017, we established a board-approved, third-party reviewed Stewardship Charter that defines our vision and our framework. Our Charter is centered on commitments to six key stakeholders, which encompass the issues most important to our business: Thriving Farms, Healthful Cows, Inspired Consumers, Enduring Ecosystems, Fulfilled Employees and Enriched Communities.



We use our Stewardship Charter as the anchor of our Stewardship Management System; that is, we have policies, procedures, documentation, measurement and communication, which cascade from the Stewardship Charter and guide our decision making. Adopting a management system like this is intentional—it ensures we embed our Stewardship commitments across all business functions, not just within our Stewardship Team. It also holds us accountable to our farmers, consumers, suppliers, employees, customers and neighbors. Upholding our Stewardship Charter is one of our five company values, or core beliefs, and one of our four business objectives, or time-bound goals.

**Cooperative Member Handbook:** TCCA farmer-owners play a critical role as both owners and as suppliers. Our Cooperative Member Handbook guides the relationship between our farmer-owners and TCCA by setting expectations for both parties. Within the Cooperative Member Handbook, we have an animal welfare section that requires all farmer-owners to produce milk in adherence with the internationally accepted five freedoms of good animal welfare, inspired by the World Organization for Animal Health:<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Provide adequate food and water.
- ▶ Provide adequate comfort and shelter.
- ▶ Provide proper handling and environments, appropriate to the species and use.
- ▶ Prevent and treat disease and injury.
- ▶ Prevent and minimize fear, pain, stress and suffering.

Additionally, our Contract Milk Suppliers Handbook guides the contractual requirements for milk sourcing from our contract suppliers and it includes policies on animal welfare and milk quality.

**FARM Program/Validus:** Farmers Assuring Responsible Management™ (FARM) was designed as a common set of practices for the humane and ethical treatment of dairy cows.<sup>2</sup> Farmers who follow these practices are required to operate within the prescribed guidelines in the FARM Animal Care Reference Manual. The manual covers subjects ranging from cow nutrition and animal health to animal environment and safe facilities. All farmer-owners and contract milk suppliers participate in the FARM program or equivalent, e.g. Validus.

The integrity of the FARM program is upheld by on-farm assessments, conducted by second-party and third-party industry experts. While we do not yet have full traceability of the milk supply of our contract manufacturers, we do know that 98 percent of the U.S. domestic milk supply participates in the FARM program. In the spirit of continuous improvement, we have implemented a Stewardship Supplier Engagement Program in partnership with a sustainability ratings platform for global sustainable procurements, that will further increase visibility into our supply chain.

**Farm Evaluation Process:** Our farm evaluation process is designed to ensure our values are upheld on farmer-owners' farms. Our TCCA Farm Services Team conducts regular evaluations to ensure farms are compliant with the FARM program, the Cooperative Member Handbook, health and food safety standards and best management practices. And, we contract with a third-party evaluator, NSF International, to evaluate our performance, as well. These internal and external inspections occur on a rotating basis.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oie.int/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nationaldairyfarm.com/>



**Key Players:** Organizationally, we have established a team of experts to ensure compliance with internal policies, government regulations and industry best practices pertaining to animal welfare. Our Director of Farm Services is a licensed veterinarian with years of farm-level experience, and she serves as the liaison between our farmer-owners and TCCA. Our Director of Environment and Community Impact is responsible for maximizing our net positive impact throughout the entire value chain ensuring that our supplier partners adhere to the same standards. Together, these key leaders and their teams work to provide assurance that every cow is treated with care.

**Key Performance Indicators:** The Dairy Sustainability Framework (DSF) is a global organization dedicated to the advancement of sustainability in the dairy industry. DSF has adopted the use of somatic cell count measurements in milk as a proxy of health and wellness in cows. This is because most somatic cells are white blood cells, which increase in number in response to an infectious organism. A lower somatic cell count, therefore, indicates no infectious organisms and better animal health.<sup>3</sup>

According to DSF, the global mean somatic cell count in 2016 was 288,000 cells per milliliter.<sup>4</sup> At TCCA, our goal is to have 85 percent of milk entering our Tillamook and Boardman manufacturing facilities to report below 200,000 cells per milliliter—far below (or better) than the global average. In 2019, an average of 71 percent of milk pounds entering Tillamook and Boardman manufacturing facilities were below 200,000 somatic cell count per milliliter. We are working hard to meet our goal of 85 percent.

In addition to somatic cell count, we track Milk Urea Nitrogen (MUN) (in mg/dl) from farmer-owners as a proxy for animal welfare and ammonia emissions. MUN is a breakdown product of protein and can be used to monitor the protein status of cows. We strive to have 100 percent of our milk pounds between the desired range, 8-14 mg/dl MUN, and currently report above 90 percent.

Finally, we track the number of Mandatory Corrective Action Plans (MCAP) and number of Continuous Improvement Plans (CIP) on farmer-owners' farms, based upon the results of farmer-owner farm evaluations. Our goal is to have zero MCAP and CIP.

## MEDICAL CARE

The FARM program requires that farms maintain a written herd health plan developed in consultation with a veterinarian to prevent, diagnose, control and treat disease or injury of all cows. Additionally, farmers are required to maintain a Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) signed by the farm owner/manager and a veterinarian of record. This documentation ensures each farm has an established working relationship with a licensed veterinarian. The veterinarian assumes responsibility for medical judgments regarding the health of the animals, and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's instructions.

## CALF CARE

Special care is necessary to raise healthy calves that will become milk cows in the herd. Newborn calves have underdeveloped immune systems, which makes them more susceptible to infections and disease than adult animals and even other newborn animals. After a calf is born, farmers bottle feed each new calf and monitor

<sup>3</sup> <https://dairysustainabilityframework.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Animal-Care-indicators-paper-1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://dairysustainabilityframework.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The-Animal-Care-Indicator-Baseline-October-2017.pdf>



the amount of colostrum, which is a mother cow's first milk that is packed with antibodies. Calves are typically housed in individual stalls or group pens with calves of similar age. Calves are raised on milk from the cows or using powdered milk replacer, monitored daily for the amount of nutrients they are receiving, and checked for illness. Separate housing, away from adult animals, prevents the possibility of injury and exposure to pathogens from full-size animals.

## **COW NUTRITION**

Dairy farmers work closely with animal nutritionists to optimize cow nutrition. While each herd may have different nutritional requirements, every cow's diet consists of forages and grains to promote good health and milk production. The forage portion generally consists of grass, grass silage, alfalfa and corn silage. The grain portion is typically a mix of grains, including corn and barley. Cows are also given a vitamin and mineral supplement to support long-term health. Of a cow's diet, 30 percent consists of nutrient-rich, high-quality agricultural by-products that humans cannot eat. This means that parts of a cow's diet, such as cannery corn, corn husks and spent grains, would otherwise end up in landfills.

## **COW HOUSING**

Cows live in all types of different environments. Some farmers opt to use a dry lot and others prefer to use free stall-options. In free-stalls, cows live in large, well-maintained barns where they are free to wander, socialize and eat as they please. These barns have an open-sided design that provides shelter, while still allowing access to daylight and fresh air. Typically, cows do not enjoy standing outside in adverse weather conditions and will opt to stay inside in these situations. In every type of housing, cows are provided with a comfortable, clean place to rest and access to feed and water.

## **MILKING**

On a typical dairy farm, cows are milked twice per day, though variation may exist based on farmer preference. Some dairy farms use robotic milking systems where milking stalls are available to dairy cows throughout the day, which allows cows to decide when they would like to be milked. A cow is typically milked for five–10 minutes before returning to her regular activities: eating, socializing and resting. In context, this means cows rest 12–14 hours per day.

*TCCA is committed to large-scale sustainability initiatives at the regional, national and global levels. Our values and stewardship commitments are aligned with and inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, The Dairy Sustainability Framework Global Criteria, the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy Stewardship Commitment and the National Milk Producers Federation FARM program.*