

FARM Program – Services offered to get your producers compliant

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Abstract

Helping dairy producers become compliant with FARM Program is an excellent way to become a valuable member of the management team on a dairy. Not only will you build trust and appreciation with your dairy producers, but you will gain billable hours for your dairy practice. This starts with reviewing the FARM Program book that each processor provides their dairy clients. From there, it involves creating and reviewing many required FARM Program protocols. Mock FARM evaluations can be performed to evaluate how a dairy will score on hygiene, body condition, hock and knee scores, and lameness. This information can be used for management and facility decisions to achieve FARM compliance during future evaluations.

Key words: FARM, quality assurance, dairy

What is FARM Program?

FARM Program stands for Farmers Assuring Responsible Management. It is a voluntary program started in 2009 by the National Milk Producers Federation with help from Dairy Management, Inc. It was started to ensure consistent standards and procedures for animal care and treatment on all dairy farms. It also ensures accurate record keeping and antibiotic management to eliminate dairy variations as much as possible. FARM Program aims to ensure environmental stewardship practices on dairy farms as well. All of these actions are good for the public perception of the dairy industry. The main goal of FARM is to assure consumers and customers that dairy farmers care for their animals, workforce, and land in a humane and ethical manner. FARM Program is the world's first animal welfare program to be ISO (International Organization for Standardization) certified. This is very important for export and global trade.

Why Should Dairy Farms Participate?

Dairy farms should want to do their part to establish the highest standards for the dairy industry. They should want to provide consumers and customers proof to where and how their dairy products are produced. Dairy farms should want to be in a "community" or on a "team" with all the other dairy farms in the US regardless of size. As a community, we want the dairy industry to be able to standardize our animal care, antibiotic stewardship, environmental stewardship,

and workforce development. Doing this helps promote and protect the dairy industry.

Why do Dairy Farms Resist the FARM Program?

Dairy farms resist FARM for several reasons. They don't want to be told what they can and can't do on their farms. They feel they don't need it. They don't see the global aspect of the dairy industry and the negative light it is often in. They are worried about where the program is headed and how much more will be required of them. Most of all, dairy farmers don't fully understand the program and what it is trying to do. This is where veterinarians can step in and help both their dairy producers and the dairy industry.

Where will our Dairy Farms Sell their Milk without being FARM Program Certified?

Even though it is a voluntary program, it will be incredibly difficult to find a processor that will buy a dairy farm's milk if they are not FARM Program certified. Currently 98% of all milk in the US is under FARM. Processors will not be able to sell milk in the open market if not all of their dairy farms they pick up milk from are FARM certified. We as dairy veterinarians cannot let even one of our dairy farms lose their market because they did not get FARM certified. In the recent uncertainty of the dairy industry, we do not need more reasons for dairy farms to not have a market.

How can we Help our Dairy Producers get Certified?

Dairy veterinarians are encouraged to take the FARM Program training or to use the resources on the FARM website to fully understand the requirements of the FARM Program.

We need to bridge the gap between dairy producers and the FARM Program. Once veterinarians understand the requirements of FARM, we need to educate our producers. By learning the FARM requirements we will be serving the dairy industry by helping our producers maintain a market, become a valuable asset to our dairy farms, and increase our billable hours for our veterinary practices.

How to help Producers Become Compliant and Increase Practice Billable Hours

Talking with dairy producers about FARM Program while already on their farms is where it starts. Ask about

their processor's FARM Program book that needs a veterinarian's signature every 12 months. Many dairy producers will know they have a book but will be unsure of why. I start my consulting by going over their processor's book with them. I use that time to go over the current FARM 4.0 requirements. I review the required written protocols that are required and ask my producers if they have them. Most dairies will be very willing to have their veterinarian write their protocols for them. Spending time on the farm following a herd check, reviewing protocols, and taking notes is a great way to gain billable hours and help dairy producers. I then type up their protocols and put copies in their FARM Program book. The time spent writing them is also billed to the producer. Most dairy producers are unaware of what the new FARM Program requirements are, and are very appreciative of their veterinarian keeping them up to date and compliant. I find that I become more of a valuable asset to all the dairies that I have helped with their FARM protocols. I have even performed mock evaluations to see how a dairy will score with the body condition, lameness, hock and knee scoring, and hygiene

scoring. This information can be used for management and facility decisions to achieve FARM compliance during future evaluations. I find that producers rely on me for even more management decisions as I begin to work closer with them. This very commonly leads to increased billable hours doing other veterinary-related work on dairies.

Keeping Dairy Farms Compliant with FARM Program

Keeping dairy farms compliant with the FARM Program is an excellent way to begin working closer with dairy farms in a consulting manner, especially for younger veterinarians. Dairy producers will be appreciative of their veterinarians' work helping them develop the necessary protocols required. As veterinarians begin working closer with dairy producers, they become a valuable member of the management team. This relationship leads to increased billable hours performing other veterinary-related services.