



TAIL DOCKING FACT SHEET

A Fact Sheet for the Canadian Dairy Industry

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Purpose of Tail Docking

Tail docking is the process of removing 1/3 to 2/3 of the tail. Some believe that docking results in improved udder and cow cleanliness, improved milk quality, and decreased incidence of mastitis. However, research does not supported this. There are welfare concerns of pain and concerns that cattle will not be able to avoid flies [1, 2, 3].

Cow & Udder Cleanliness

Studies that compared cow and udder cleanliness between docked and undocked cows have reported no difference in cleanliness [2, 3]. Additionally, studies have reported that there was no difference in somatic cell count (SCC) and incidence of mastitis [2, 3].

Pain

Tail docking is a painful procedure. Once healed, cows with docked tails have demonstrated increased sensitivity to heat and cold. This sensitivity is like the sensitivity reported by amputees with phantom limb pain [4].

Fly Burden

Cattle use their tails as a fly swatter. Cattle that have had their tails docked have been reported to have a greater fly burden than those with tails [2].

Alternatives to Tail Docking

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association officially opposes tail docking dairy cattle [5]. The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle requires that cattle not be tail docked, unless medically necessary. It also recommends switch trimming (trimming the long hairs at the end of the tail) as an alternative and strategies to improve cow cleanliness [1].

CODE REQUIREMENTS

- Dairy cattle must not be tail docked unless medically necessary

CODE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use alternatives to tail docking (e.g. switch trimming)
- Build stalls and floors that contribute to cow cleanliness
- Clean stalls and floors frequently to ensure cow cleanliness
- Trim tail switches two to three times per year

National Farm Animal Care Council, 2009

References:

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