



Producer Engagement Team Call to Action

Issue Alert:

ABC World News and Nightline Segments on Dairy Animal Care

The Opportunity:

- ✓ Be prepared to engage in values-based discussions with your community and the media about the content contained in the ABC News reports on animal care in the dairy industry. The segment presents an opportunity for you to educate audiences on animal welfare issues and to build understanding of and support for today's animal agriculture practices.
- ✓ The following pages include talking points on the topic that you can use as a resource should the segment become an issue in your local community or state.

Resources Available in this Packet:

- ✓ Overview of this issue.
- ✓ CFI customizable values-based messaging platform.
- ✓ Best practices for constructing a letter to the editor
- ✓ Best practices for a “proportional response” and deciding when, and if, engagement with media or neighbors is necessary.

Resources Available Upon Request:

- ✓ Personnel from the Center for Food Integrity can work directly with you at no charge to customize these messages to your state or operation, or to strategize your response to local interview requests, etc.
- ✓ Contact Jim Fallon at (816) 556-3129 or via email at jim.fallon@foodintegrity.org.



Producer Engagement Team Issue Overview:

This week, ABC World News with Diane Sawyer is expected to air reports showing undercover video shot by Mercy for Animals. The videos include shots of tail docking and dehorning procedures along with alleged abuse of animals.

The advance story, posted on ABC News' website on January 26, was entitled: "*Got Milk? Got Ethics? Animal Rights v. U.S. Dairy Industry.*" The segment is expected to discuss the need for additional laws to regulate dairy farms in the U.S. From the advance story:

Animals rights groups say the big operations create abuse. "Every single time that we send investigators undercover into America's factory farms, they emerge with startling evidence of animal cruelty and neglect," said Runkle of Mercy for Animals.

"We really think that this goes hand in hand and is inherent in industrial animal agriculture where these animals are really being treated and viewed as little more than production units," he said.

Summary

Video is one of the most powerful tools used by animal rights groups. Combined with the credibility that a national news outlet holds, this story is likely to evoke strong emotions and response by viewers. Also, consumer print outlets are likely to do follow up stories, bringing the issue front and center to millions of consumers across the U.S.

It is imperative that the animal agriculture industry do its part to correct misleading information. We encourage you to view the segment and set the record straight by discussing the ethical and scientifically verified practices you use on your farm each and every day.



CFI Values-Based Messaging Platform

Below are *values-based* statements that you can use as you engage in discussions or answer questions about the ABC World News segment. CFI can help you tailor this information to your particular state or operation.

- Many animal rights groups use extreme cases to make damaging and emotionally charged generalizations to oppose contemporary animal agriculture. It is important to consider facts as well as emotion. I have a moral obligation to provide for the well-being of my farm animals, and I rely on veterinarians and science to provide guidance on best practices for their care.
- Animal abuse in any form is unacceptable. The actions of a few “bad actors” in no way reflect the high standards demonstrated daily by a vast majority of America’s farmers and ranchers. I am committed to providing for the well-being of my animals and providing consumers a safe, abundant and affordable supply of food. In fact, I’ve committed my life to it.
- My farm is family oriented, and I care deeply about how it is operated. The production practices I use are ethically grounded, scientifically verified, and economically viable. They allow me to do what’s right for the animal, while maximizing efficiency and meeting the growing demand for food.
- I understand that contemporary agriculture doesn’t look like it did in the past. But we’re not unlike many other industries that have had to become more efficient to survive. Can you think of any business in the United States that has not changed significantly in the last 50 years? Livestock farmers have changed in order to remain competitive with other states and other countries. And they have done so responsibly.
- Animal agriculture is the lifeblood of my hometown and many other rural communities in this state. Rural communities help maintain a viable economy by creating jobs, supporting local businesses, contributing to the tax base and keeping young producers on the farm. Banning proven animal husbandry practices could negatively impact animal agriculture’s important role in local communities like mine by forcing some operations into other states or putting them out of business.

Specific Tail Docking and Dehorning Messaging (via Dairy Management, Inc.)

Tail Docking

- Some dairy farmers crop the tails of their animals to promote cleanliness, similar to what people do to some breeds of dogs.
- Some farmers find that tail-docking prevents eye and face injuries for dairy workers.
- Because the procedure has limited impact on the animal's comfort, and no negative impact on the safety or quality of milk, we regard this as one of the many individual management decisions dairy farmers make in their operations.
- The National Dairy FARM program does not recommend the use of tail docking. Switch trimming, which is the removal of the hair at the end of the tail, is recommended as a preferred alternative to tail docking.

Dehorning

- Dehorning has been used for decades to help reduce the risk of injury to cows and animal handlers.
- Dairy farmers and veterinarians ensure the comfort and safety of an animal during the dehorning process through sedation or anesthesia.



Tools You Can Use Letters to the Editor: Best Practices

Proactive outreach, such as a letter to the editor, is a critical component of the Center for Food Integrity (CFI) Producer Engagement Team's activities. Proactive outreach can be used for many purposes; primarily, it helps correct inaccuracies, promotes animal agriculture and maintains consistent values-based messaging on behalf of the industry.

Letters to the editor of local newspapers are an effective, quick and persuasive grassroots advocacy tactic. Letters to the editor allow you to offer a short rebuttal to an article or commentary, or add a crucial missing perspective to the public debate. Most importantly, they provide you with the distinct opportunity to communicate directly to the public, and frame how a certain issue impacts you and your family.

Best Practices:

- ✓ **Be polite.** Respect the people you're talking about, even if you disagree with their position. Comment on actions more than personalities.
- ✓ **Always address the letter "To the editor."**
- ✓ **Identify yourself as a producer** so it is clear to editors that you are qualified to speak out on the issue at hand.
- ✓ **Be specific.** If you're commenting on an article in the paper, mention the day and page number of the article. If you're commenting on a specific position or speech, restate it briefly. Don't assume the reader knows what you're talking about: Tell them. Example: "I disagree with Senator Gram's position on confirming judges, as reported in Sunday's Minneapolis Star Tribune (pA12, 2/16/09)."
- ✓ **Send your letters quickly** – within a 24-hour span, if possible. Timely responses will increase your chances of getting your letter to the editor published.
- ✓ **Make your points concise.** Letters should not exceed 250 words. Your newspaper should have guidelines for length and submission published on their web site.
- ✓ **Be positive when appropriate.** Don't hesitate to send a complimentary letter to the newspaper for a good editorial or story.
- ✓ **Stick to one topic.** Deal with one issue, article or speech per letter.
- ✓ **State the purpose of the letter at the beginning** – editors often cut from the bottom.
- ✓ **Use facts and figures to back up your arguments.** Quote other experts who commented on the same subject, especially if the news article did not mention them.

- ✓ **Use a personal story to make your point.**
- ✓ **Always proofread your letter** for spelling, grammar and punctuation. Ask a friend or family member to read it to ensure it flows and is error free.
- ✓ **Send your letter to your local newspaper via e-mail** and include your letter in the body of the text, not as a separate attachment.
- ✓ **Keep track of any response you get.** Take note when a reader agrees or disagrees with your letter. Perhaps the points they've used in their letter will enhance your argument some other time.
- ✓ **Include your name, address and phone number at the bottom** of the e-mail so your letter can be verified.
- ✓ **Save a copy.** Just in case they edit it, you'll know exactly how it was changed.

Constructing Your Letter to the Editor:

Use the following outline as a guide in writing an effective letter to the editor:

1. **Introduction** — State the thesis of original article or public debate.
2. **Opinion** — Use your opinion or experiences to support or contradict the writer's point.
3. **Anecdote** — Relate relevant personal experience.
4. **Evidence** — Cite an independent study or report, if applicable.
5. **Conclusion** — Restate your opinion.
6. **Signature** — Sign the letter, and provide your contact information. (This is for the editors only; media outlets will not publish your personal contact information.)

Resources Available to Help You Construct Your Letter to the Editor:

Personnel from the Center for Food Integrity can work directly with you at no charge to customize your letters to the editor. Contact Jim Fallon at (816) 556-3129 or via email at jim.fallon@foodintegrity.org for additional information or assistance.



Tools You Can Use

Proportional Responses: Best Practices

While it is important to respond to issues involving contemporary animal agriculture, it is just as important to know *if* and *when* you should respond. At the Center for Food Integrity, we call this the “art of the proportional response.”

Sharing your opinions about a specific event such as the airing of animal abuse documentaries or the release of a new film about the food system may seem proactive. However, it could also create controversy where none existed — giving the issue a platform and a larger audience.

When to Engage

So when do you take action? The key is to monitor conversations to see if the community is expressing concern:

- **In your local community:** Are your friends or neighbors approaching you about the issue? Is it being talked about at the coffee shop, PTA meetings or church functions?
- **In the news:** Has the issue surfaced in the local paper, or on local television and radio talk shows and newscasts?

There is no need to draw attention to the topic if no one is talking about it. Even if the subject comes up once or twice in close circles — it still may not deserve a response. However, if you feel the conversation is taking root in your community, and particularly if it is getting media attention, then it is time to develop and implement a communication strategy quickly.

Communication Strategy

Make your response appropriate. A neighbor expressing concern in a conversation with you certainly would not merit a letter to the editor. Newspaper coverage of the topic would, however.

Guidelines:

- **One-on-One:** Take advantage of one-on-one conversations and small group discussions to immediately address concerns. Offer visits to your farm and additional resources.
- **Media Coverage:** Respond to media coverage with either a letter to the editor or a longer opinion/editorial exploring issues in depth. In the event of a newspaper, radio or television story on animal rights issues, contact the newsroom and offer an interview and tour of your farm. It is critical that your response to media coverage be very timely.

The editor or TV/radio producer is interested in the story for a very short period of time. In addition, if you wait too long to respond your feedback may actually trigger another cycle of media coverage.

- **Community:** If the issue has been in the news and has created a buzz in the larger community, consider speaking to community groups or writing a letter to the editor.

Regardless of the circumstance, engaging in civil, educational and values-based conversations will help earn trust and build important relationships. If you are unsure whether to engage, please feel free to contact us at the Center for Food Integrity. Our counsel and assistance is available at no charge to you.