

## National Mastitis Council

### Position Statement on Tail Docking of Dairy Cattle

#### Background

The bovine tail has several physiological and behavioral functions, including dissipation of heat, and facilitation of visual communication among cattle and with human caretakers. The tail also serves as a primary mechanism of fly control. Tail docking was implemented to decrease mastitis and improve worker comfort. The procedure is performed on calves of various ages, ranging from less than two months of age to more than two years of age. Current scientific literature indicates that routine tail docking provides no improvement in hygiene, milk quality, or incidence of mastitis. Additionally, tail docking does cause pain and can lead to distress during the fly season.

The practice of tail docking has been banned in many European countries including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

Multiple professional organizations have policy statements opposing the routine docking of tails.

- The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)<sup>1</sup> states ***“The AVMA opposes routine tail docking of cattle. Current scientific literature indicates that routine tail docking provides no benefit to the animal, and that tail docking can lead to distress during fly seasons. When medically necessary, amputation of tails must be performed by a licensed veterinarian.”***
- The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association’s policy statement<sup>2</sup> reads ***“The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) is opposed to the docking of the tails of dairy cattle. Tail docking does not contribute to the improved health of the cow.”***
- The policy statement of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP)<sup>3</sup> indicates that ***“The AABP opposes the routine tail docking of cattle. Current scientific literature indicates that routine tail docking provides no benefit to the animal.”***
- The Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching<sup>4</sup> states ***“.. no benefits to cattle welfare have been associated with tail docking. The routine use of tail docking in research or teaching herds should be discouraged, and alternatives to tail docking (such as trimming switches with clippers or fastening the switch out of the way) are recommended when appropriate. Any use of tail docking, other than for medical reasons, should be reviewed and approved by the IACUC.”***

#### National Mastitis Council Policy Statement

***The National Mastitis Council (NMC) knows of no evidence that tail docking improves cow welfare, cow hygiene, or milk quality. NMC, in agreement with other professional organizations, opposes the routine use of tail docking in dairy cattle.***

#### References

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animal\\_welfare/tail\\_docking\\_cattle.asp](http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animal_welfare/tail_docking_cattle.asp)

<sup>2</sup><http://canadianveterinarians.net/ShowText.aspx?ResourceID=1948>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.aabp.org/members/documents/sece.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.fass.org/docs/agguide3rd/Chapter07.pdf>