



# ON-FARM PROTOCOLS

Developing a herd health plan that's right for you starts with a strong veterinary-client-patient relationship

Animal health is the most important part of maintaining a productive herd. One approach to improving your herd's health is by developing an on-farm animal health program specific to your operation.

Farms differ in their management strategies, animal housing systems, feed and water, and even bacteria and viruses. What works for one farm may not work for the next, so it's important to work closely with your veterinarian to develop an on-farm health program that works for you.

Part of developing a herd health program is developing and maintaining a strong veterinary-client-patient relationship. Your vet has first-hand knowledge of your farm and is familiar with your animals and management style. Working closely with your vet provides an opportunity to assess your operation to manage animal health risks and set goals. Being able to quickly identify risks and areas needing improvement will help reduce animal health issues and treat them before they become a bigger problem.

A health plan's main goal is to promote and optimize your cows' health and well-being by minimizing mortalities, illnesses and injuries. Your health plan isn't just about preventing diseases; it should also include certain param-

eters, such as nutrition, reproduction and biosecurity. A herd health plan should be kept simple, realistic and achievable, and should include a set of written protocols that are simple and easy-to-use. It's important to regularly review the plan with your herd vet. Additional parameters that should be included in your plan are:

- general farm information, such as animal type and numbers, and key contacts;
- biosecurity protocols;
- daily cleaning and disinfection schedules;
- calf management procedures;
- disease prevention strategies, such as vaccinations;
- nutrition;
- reproductive management;
- euthanasia and deadstock policies;
- record-keeping.

The implementation of proAction further emphasizes the importance of overall animal care. Several of the herd health program parameters listed above are also mandatory procedures for proAction. For example, standard operating procedures are required for colostrum management and calf feeding, along with animal health practices, such as disbudding, dehorning, castration and extra teat removal. Your calf management protocols

should include cleaning, feeding, providing electrolytes, navel dipping and at least twice daily monitoring for signs of illness. This is a good way to ensure calf health issues are caught early.

Another important parameter to include in your on-farm health plan is record-keeping. Along with keeping track of treatment withdrawal times, this action is important for benchmarking overall animal health and performance. Without detailed records, keeping track of overall health and performance becomes more troublesome, and health problems will be more difficult to track. With detailed records, you can identify year-over-year trends to better track successes and monitor areas needing improvement.

A herd health plan is important to ensure your cows' long-term productivity. Working with your vet to help develop a program tailored to your farm is needed to address important health issues you may encounter. Keep your herd health plan simple so anyone working on your farm can use it. Ensure family members and farm staff are familiar with the plan and its protocols. If you are interested in developing an on-farm animal health program for your operation, speak with your vet about getting started. 



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*Photo courtesy of Lachlan Wepler*



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