



Full-length advantage

Research supports Code of Practice requirement to keep your cows' tails intact

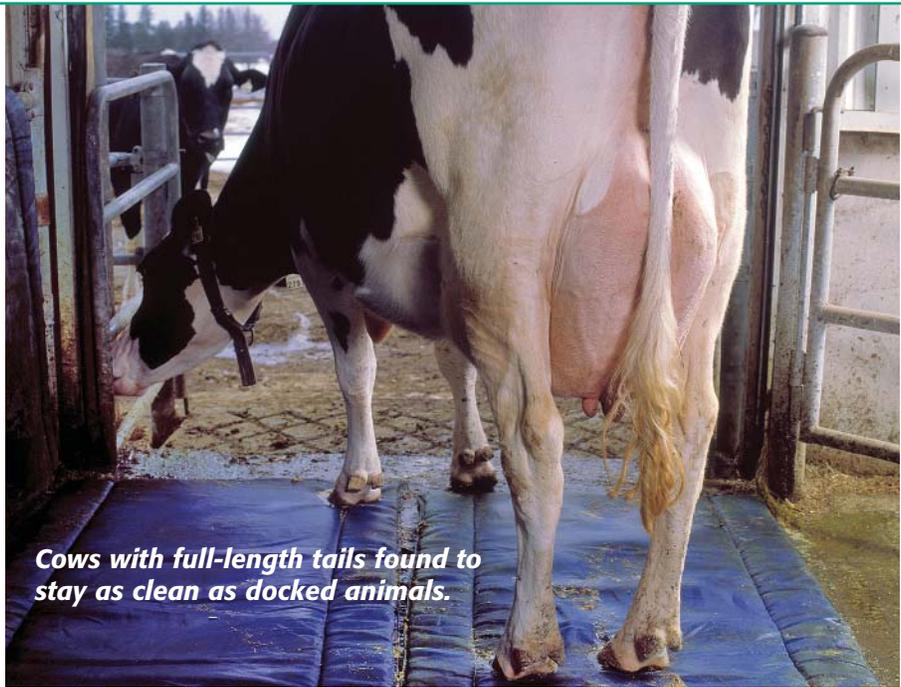
Keeping your cows' tails intact, the norm on most Canadian dairy farms, is now a requirement. Lopping them off provides no real benefits and could potentially harm the dairy industry's public reputation for humane treatment of animals.

The science-based *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle*—distributed to all Canadian producers in 2009—has a new requirement prohibiting tail docking unless medically necessary.

Tail docking first became common in New Zealand. Workers thought it could reduce their risk of contracting diseases like *leptospirosis* from cows. Some people also believed docking improved cow cleanliness, and cleaner cows would be exposed to fewer pathogens and have improved udder health.

Research has now shown tail docking is unrelated to worker health, and offers no cow cleanliness or udder health advantages. Controlled studies on working dairy farms in Canada and the U.S. have shown no differences in udder or leg hygiene, somatic cell count, or prevalence of intramammary infections in tail-docked cows compared with those with tails intact.

Tail docking actually has disadvantages. It causes pain, and prevents cows from using their natural flyswatters. It can result in the growth of nerve bundles at the tail stump, a potential source of chronic pain. The procedure can also lead to infections, including tetanus or gangrene. For



Cows with full-length tails found to stay as clean as docked animals.

these reasons, several European countries, including Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, prohibit tail docking.

In New York state recently, there have been calls to follow California's lead and ban tail docking after an unflattering video posted on YouTube, a popular website, triggered a public uproar. California passed legislation outlawing tail docking last year.

Some milkers prefer working with docked cows because the shortened tail is less likely to hit them in the parlour. However, producers have options to improve worker comfort, without resorting to tail docking. The *Code of Practice* recommends best practices such as trimming the

switch. Also, modern parallel milking parlours can be designed so milkers do not come in contact with a cow's tail.

If you want to share your views on tail docking with others, Dan Weary and Marina von Keyserlingk at the University of British Columbia are hosting an online discussion on this issue. To participate, please visit www.yourviews.ubc.ca/node/1091.

Drs. Dan Weary and Marina von Keyserlingk are professors and industrial research chairs in cattle welfare at the University of British Columbia. Shelley Crabtree is acting assistant director, communications and policy, Dairy Farmers of Canada.