

The US dairy industry is being encouraged to discontinue tail amputations of dairy cows. Farmers in recent decades have engaged in “tail docking” under the thought that amputation of the tail helps with hygiene and makes it easier for the humans to work with the cows. According to veterinary research, the practice provides little, if any, hygiene benefit and can be harmful to the animals as it inhibits their ability to defend against flies.

The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), the largest dairy-industry group, said it would oppose tail amputation in its animal care program used by 1/3 of the nation’s milk producers. Up to 82% of Midwest farmers practice tail amputations.

NMPF has a 10-year phase out program. NMPF President stated it is easier to make the change rather than to give the animal-rights community a tool with which to beat on dairy farmers. NMPF’s vice chairman stated that concerns trickling down from retailers who get feedback from shoppers motivated NMPF’s decision. NMPF does not believe the amputations are harmful. Both the American and Canadian Veterinary Medical Association calls for the practice to be banned as harmful to the animals.

California banned the amputations in 2009. Tail amputations are also practiced in Australia and actually originated in New Zealand where it is still practiced.

In October 2012 following an undercover video documenting dairy cow abuse, Kraft foods announced it will take action to ban tail docking in its supply chain-the first major corporation in the US to step up to end this painful practice.