

Animal Observations: Broken tails

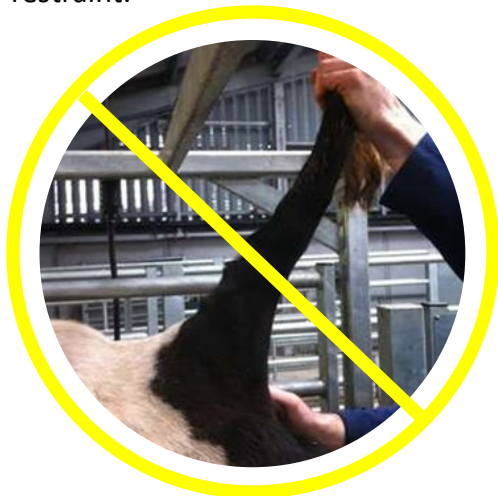
95% or more of lactating cows observed should have unbroken tails.



Tails can get broken, damaged or shortened through mechanical damage (from scrapers, being stepped on, doors, or parlor gates), inappropriate handling (twisting, jacking or other rough handling) or other individual reasons. Tail injury is painful to the cow given the constant activity of the tail and therefore compromises the cow's welfare. Broken tails suggest there has been or is a handling and stockmanship breakdown. Calm and appropriate handling does not harm the animal.

Evidence of a broken tail will remain for the lifetime of the cow and therefore the presence of broken tails within a herd may demonstrate a historical problem and not necessarily a present one. It is therefore important to establish when and how the injury occurred, in order to reduce the risk in the future.

- Never use a tail aggressively to move a cow. An observation of aggressive tail use can detect farm-wide problems in animal handling.
- Tails should be used to restrain animals in very limited situations. It is more appropriate to use halters, mechanical restraints (e.g., chutes, stocks, stanchions) or chemical restraint.



- Investigate patterns in tail breaks considering the age class affected, the location of the breaks within the tail, and by observing handling to determine when and how tails are being broken.

Broken Tail Scoring

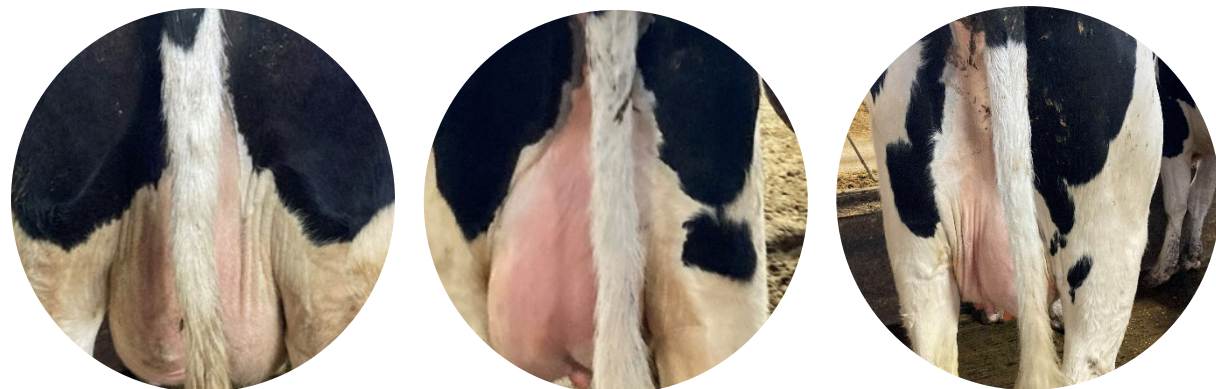
Not broken: Tail does not have ANY swellings, deviations in vertebrae that can be seen, nor any evidence of necrotic tissue in the tail.

Broken: Tail has ANY swellings, deviations in vertebrae that can be seen, or any evidence of necrotic tissue in the tail.

A break may be very obvious



Or less obvious



Tail docking

The National Dairy FARM Program opposes the routine tail docking of dairy animals, except in the extraordinary case of traumatic injury to an animal. This practice was phased out under FARM Program standards as of January 1, 2017. If a traumatic injury requires the tail to be docked, a veterinarian should perform and document the procedure.

Additional Information:

National Dairy FARM Animal Care Reference Manual Version 4

SOP: Cattle Restraint, Virginia Tech 2017

<http://www.assurewel.org/dairy cows/brokentails.html>

