Millennium Farm Trust

GN17 Animal Welfare Policy

Next review date April 2027

Version Control

Version number	Date of changes	Who	Review summary
02	April 2021	T Freathy	Scheduled review. No changes
	April 2024	T Freathy	Scheduled review. No changes
03	Nov 2025	T Freathy	Revision following GCQM audit
04	Aug 2026	T Freathy	Revision following best practice guidance.

1. Introduction

Depden Care Farm is a working smallholding covering approximately six acres. We keep a range of animals to support the aims and activities of the care farm, including equines, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry and small animals.
Animals provide valuable opportunities for Farm Helpers to develop practical skills, confidence, responsibility, relationships and wellbeing through meaningful activity. Some animals also provide produce or livestock which may be sold to support the charitable work of Millennium Farm Trust (MFT).
Keeping animals brings significant responsibilities. Their welfare must always come before their value as a learning activity, therapeutic resource or source of income.

2. Policy Statement

Millennium Farm Trust is committed to high standards of animal health, welfare and husbandry. We recognise our ethical and legal responsibilities under the **Animal Welfare Act 2006**, the **Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations**, relevant statutory Codes of Practice, veterinary guidance and other requirements applicable to the species we keep.
No activity, learning outcome, Farm Helper experience or operational consideration will be prioritised above the welfare and humane treatment of an animal in our care.
We aim to ensure that:

- animals are cared for appropriately and humanely;
- their physical, behavioural and welfare needs are understood and met;
- illness, injury and distress are identified and acted upon promptly;
- staff and volunteers involved in animal care are appropriately trained and competent;
- Farm Helpers receive instruction and supervision appropriate to them and the task;
- agreed husbandry practices are followed consistently; and

- veterinary or specialist advice is sought whenever necessary.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- all livestock, equines, poultry and small animals kept by MFT;
- all staff, volunteers, Trustees, contractors and Farm Helpers involved with those animals; and
- the housing, feeding, handling, movement, transport, treatment, breeding, sale and disposal of animals where applicable.

Everyone involved with animals at DCF has a responsibility to treat them with care and respect and to report concerns about their welfare.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Board of Trustees

The Board provides governance and oversight and seeks assurance that appropriate arrangements are in place to meet MFT's legal and ethical responsibilities for animal welfare.

4.2 Director

The Director is the registered keeper of MFT's animal stock and has overall executive responsibility for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place for animal welfare and for compliance with this policy.

The Director will ensure that appropriate staffing arrangements are made for the care of animals every day, including weekends, holidays and periods when the Farm is not otherwise operating.

4.3 Operations Manager

The Operations Manager has day-to-day operational responsibility for animal husbandry at Depden Care Farm.

This includes responsibility for:

- establishing and overseeing animal-care routines;
- determining agreed husbandry and handling practices;
- ensuring appropriate arrangements for feeding, housing, turnout and routine care;
- monitoring animal health and welfare;
- ensuring appropriate records are maintained;
- arranging veterinary or other specialist advice where required;
- ensuring staff and volunteers are appropriately instructed, trained and supervised; and
- determining when changes to established animal-care arrangements should be made.

4.4 Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers involved in animal care are responsible for:

- following agreed animal-care routines and instructions;
- working within their competence;
- treating animals calmly and humanely;
- reporting health, welfare or behavioural concerns promptly;
- keeping required records;
- following relevant risk assessments, biosecurity arrangements and safe systems of work; and

- seeking advice if they are unsure what to do.

5. Welfare Standards

MFT seeks to ensure that the welfare needs of animals are met in accordance with recognised animal-welfare principles, including the **Five Freedoms**.

5.1 Freedom from hunger and thirst
Animals will have appropriate access to fresh, clean water and receive suitable feed in sufficient quantities to maintain their health and condition.

5.2 Freedom from discomfort
Animals will be provided with appropriate shelter, bedding, housing, space and environmental conditions.

5.3 Freedom from pain, injury and disease
Reasonable preventative healthcare measures will be taken and illness or injury will be identified and treated promptly. Veterinary advice will be obtained where appropriate.

5.4 Freedom to express normal behaviour
Housing and management should enable animals, as far as reasonably practicable, to express normal species-specific behaviours including grazing, foraging, rooting, dust bathing, movement, social interaction and exploration.

5.5 Freedom from fear and distress
Animals must be handled calmly and humanely. Husbandry, training, handling and Farm Helper activities should seek to minimise avoidable fear, stress and distress.

6. Species-Specific Care

MFT will take account of the particular welfare requirements of each species kept at the Farm and relevant government Codes of Practice, veterinary advice and recognised good husbandry practice. This includes, as applicable:

- equines;
- sheep;
- goats;
- pigs;
- poultry; and
- domestic and small animals.

Staff must not assume that experience or competence with one species automatically makes them competent to undertake unfamiliar tasks with another.
Where specialist knowledge is required, appropriate veterinary or other competent advice will be sought.

7. Consistency of Animal Care

Consistency is an important part of good animal welfare and safe care-farm practice.
All staff and volunteers must therefore follow the animal-care routines, husbandry arrangements and instructions agreed by the Operations Manager.
This includes arrangements relating to:

- feeding and nutrition;
- turnout and grazing;
- housing and bedding;
- cleaning;
- handling and restraint;
- routine healthcare;
- medication;
- enrichment;
- movement between areas; and
- other day-to-day husbandry.

Individual members of staff or volunteers must **not introduce significant changes to agreed animal-care routines or husbandry practices on their own initiative**, except where immediate action is reasonably necessary to protect the welfare or safety of an animal or person.

MFT recognises and values the experience and expertise that individual staff and volunteers may bring, including specialist knowledge of particular species such as horses. Staff are encouraged to share that knowledge, raise concerns and suggest improvements.
However, proposed changes should be discussed with and agreed by the Operations Manager before being introduced. Where appropriate, veterinary or other specialist advice should be obtained.
Once an approach has been agreed, everyone is expected to follow it consistently.
This is important because:

- animals benefit from predictable and consistent care;
- Farm Helpers need to be taught safe and consistent methods;
- colleagues need to know what care has been provided;
- changes may affect welfare, health and safety, biosecurity, medication or risk assessments; and
- responsibility and accountability for animal husbandry must remain clear.

Where an animal's immediate welfare requires urgent action, a competent member of staff should take reasonable action within their knowledge and competence, obtaining veterinary advice where necessary. Any significant departure from the normal routine must be reported to the Operations Manager as soon as practicable and appropriately recorded.

If a member of staff is unsure what to do, they should stop and ask rather than improvise.

8. Staffing, Competence and Training

MFT recognises that good animal welfare depends upon the competence of the people caring for animals.
Staff and volunteers undertaking animal-care duties will receive appropriate induction, instruction, training and supervision.
MFT will ensure that:

- new staff and volunteers are introduced to DCF's agreed animal-care routines;
- individuals only undertake animal-care activities for which they have sufficient knowledge and competence or appropriate supervision;
- competence is assessed through observation and day-to-day management, rather than assumed solely from previous experience;
- additional instruction, training or supervision is provided where required;
- relevant animal-welfare knowledge is refreshed periodically;
- changes to agreed procedures are communicated to everyone who needs to know; and
- specialist or veterinary advice is obtained where the necessary expertise is not available internally.

Previous experience with animals is valuable and should be recognised. However, **previous experience does not remove the requirement to follow DCF's agreed practices**.
Staff with specialist knowledge are encouraged to contribute to the development and improvement of those practices through discussion with the Operations Manager.
Where a staff member has not been trained, is not confident or does not believe themselves competent to undertake a particular animal-care task, they must say so and seek appropriate instruction or assistance.

9. Housing, Environment and Enrichment

Animal accommodation will be appropriate to the species and will provide, as applicable:

- adequate ventilation;
- appropriate space;
- clean and dry bedding;
- safe flooring, fencing and pen design;
- natural light where reasonably practicable;
- suitable grazing or turnout;
- protection from inappropriate weather conditions;
- access to clean water; and
- appropriate environmental enrichment.

Housing, fencing, gates, equipment, water supplies and feed areas will be monitored regularly. Defects or hazards that may compromise welfare or safety must be reported promptly and appropriate action taken.

10. Handling and Movement

All animal handling must be:

- calm, controlled and humane;
- undertaken by competent people or Farm Helpers under appropriate supervision;
- carried out in accordance with DCF's agreed handling methods and instructions from the Operations Manager;
- appropriate to the animal, circumstances and competence of those involved; and
- never unnecessarily rushed, aggressive or punitive.

Restraint equipment and other handling equipment must be appropriate, safe and maintained in good condition.

The welfare of the animal must take priority over completing an activity.

11. Animal Health, Monitoring and Records

Animals will receive regular observation and appropriate health monitoring.
Records will be maintained as appropriate for the species and circumstances, including:

- births and deaths;
- purchases, sales and movements;
- veterinary treatment;
- medicines administered;
- medication withdrawal periods;
- vaccination and parasite-control arrangements;
- significant health or welfare concerns;
- biosecurity incidents; and
- other statutory records.

Health concerns must be reported promptly to the Operations Manager or other designated competent person.
Where appropriate, veterinary advice will be sought without unnecessary delay.
Records will be retained securely and made available for inspection or audit where required.

12. Medicines and Veterinary Treatment

Veterinary medicines must only be obtained, stored, administered and recorded in accordance with legal requirements, veterinary instructions and DCF procedures.
Medication must only be administered by, or under the supervision of, a person competent and authorised to do so.
Staff must not independently alter veterinary treatment, dosage or medication arrangements.
Any concern about prescribed treatment should be raised with the Operations Manager and, where necessary, the veterinary surgeon.
Withdrawal periods for animals or animal products intended for the food chain must be observed and recorded.

13. Sick or Injured Animals

Any animal showing signs of significant illness, injury or distress must be assessed promptly by a competent person.
Depending upon the circumstances:

- the animal may be separated from other animals;
- appropriate first aid or immediate care may be provided;
- the animal will be monitored;
- veterinary advice or treatment will be obtained; and
- appropriate records will be made.

Isolation arrangements should be appropriate to the species, condition and veterinary advice.
Isolation should not itself cause unnecessary distress or compromise welfare.
An animal should only return to its normal group or routine when it is appropriate to do so.

14. Notifiable and Infectious Disease

MFT recognises its responsibility to prevent, identify and respond appropriately to notifiable and other significant infectious animal diseases.
Examples may include:

- avian influenza (bird flu);
- bluetongue;
- African swine fever;
- foot and mouth disease;
- bovine tuberculosis; and
- other diseases designated as notifiable by the relevant authority.

Staff must remain alert to unusual signs of illness or unexplained changes in animal health or behaviour and report concerns promptly to the Operations Manager.
Where a notifiable disease is suspected:

- unnecessary movement of the affected animal and potentially exposed animals will cease;
- appropriate isolation or movement controls will be implemented;
- the Operations Manager and Director will be informed immediately;
- veterinary advice will be obtained;
- the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) will be notified where required; and
- statutory instructions concerning movement, isolation, testing, cleaning, disinfection and biosecurity will be followed.

Disease Control Measures
MFT will comply with any statutory disease-control measures, Government or APHA instructions, veterinary directions, protection or surveillance zones, restricted zones, movement controls, housing requirements or additional biosecurity measures that apply to the Farm.

This may include, for example, temporary measures introduced in response to **avian influenza, bluetongue or another disease outbreak**, whether or not disease has been identified on the Farm itself.
Where additional controls are introduced, the Operations Manager will ensure that relevant staff and volunteers are informed of the arrangements and that Farm routines, risk assessments and activities are adapted accordingly.

Such measures may include:

- restricting access to animal areas;
- additional cleaning and disinfection;
- dedicated footwear, clothing or PPE;
- enhanced handwashing and hygiene arrangements;
- restrictions on animal movements, purchases or sales;
- housing or separation of animals;
- restrictions on visitors, vehicles or equipment;
- suspension or modification of Farm Helper activities involving animals; and
- any other measures required by legislation, APHA, veterinary advice or the applicable disease-control declaration.

All staff and volunteers must follow these additional arrangements while they are in force, even where they differ from the Farm's normal animal-care routines.

Activities involving Farm Helpers, volunteers, visitors or animals may be restricted or suspended where necessary to protect animal or human health and to comply with statutory disease-control requirements.

15. Biosecurity

MFT will take reasonable and proportionate measures to reduce the risk of disease being introduced to, transmitted within or spread from the Farm.
Measures may include:

- appropriate control of visitors and movements around animal areas;
- handwashing facilities;
- cleaning or disinfection of footwear and equipment where required;
- appropriate work clothing and PPE;
- safe storage of feed;
- pest control and waste management;
- appropriate isolation of new or sick animals;
- cleaning of equipment and vehicles; and
- additional measures during periods of increased disease risk.

Particular attention will be given to zoonotic infection because of the contact between animals, Farm Helpers, staff, volunteers and visitors.
Staff must follow any temporary biosecurity measures introduced in response to an increased disease risk, even where these differ from normal Farm routines.

16. Animal Transport

Where animals are transported on or off site:

- legal requirements relating to animal transport will be followed;
- competent handlers will be used;
- vehicles and equipment will be suitable for the animals concerned;
- loading and unloading will be undertaken calmly and safely;
- animals will be appropriately secured;
- journey times will be minimised where reasonably practicable; and
- vehicles will be appropriately cleaned and disinfected.

Where specialist or licensed transport is required, an appropriate provider will be used.

17. Farm Helper Involvement

Farm Helpers are actively involved in animal care because it provides valuable opportunities to develop skills, confidence, responsibility and independence.
Their involvement must nevertheless be appropriate to the individual, animal and task.
DCF will ensure that:

- Farm Helpers receive appropriate instruction;
- their competence is developed progressively;
- supervision reflects the individual's abilities and the risks associated with the task;
- relevant individual and activity risk assessments are followed;
- appropriate PPE is provided;
- safeguarding and infection-control requirements are observed; and
- Farm Helpers are not expected to undertake animal-care activities independently until it is safe and appropriate for them to do so.

Farm Helpers should be encouraged to recognise and report signs that an animal may be unwell, injured, distressed or behaving unusually.
No learning activity or outcome justifies compromising animal welfare.

18. Euthanasia and End-of-Life Decisions

MFT recognises that humane euthanasia may sometimes be necessary to prevent unnecessary suffering or where an animal's quality of life has deteriorated significantly.
Decisions will be made compassionately and, where appropriate, with veterinary advice.
Euthanasia will only be undertaken by a person legally authorised and competent to do so.
Relevant decisions and actions will be appropriately recorded.
The potential impact upon Farm Helpers should also be considered and appropriate support provided where an animal with which they have developed a relationship dies or is euthanised.

19. Reporting Concerns

Everyone at DCF is encouraged and expected to raise concerns about animal welfare.
A staff member, volunteer or Farm Helper who believes that:

- an animal is ill, injured or distressed;
- agreed care arrangements are not being followed;
- an animal is being handled inappropriately;
- they have made an error affecting an animal's welfare; or
- an existing husbandry practice may need to change,

should raise the matter promptly with the Operations Manager or, where appropriate, the Director.
No one should ignore a welfare concern because they assume somebody else will deal with it. Where an immediate risk exists, reasonable action should be taken to protect the animal while appropriate advice is sought.

20. Related Documents

This policy should be read alongside relevant:

- Health & Safety policies;
- risk assessments and safe systems of work;
- biosecurity arrangements;
- medicines and veterinary records;
- incident reporting procedures;
- staff and volunteer induction arrangements;
- Employee Handbook;
- Code of Conduct; and
- species-specific guidance and husbandry arrangements.

21. Review

This policy will normally be reviewed annually and earlier where appropriate following:

- significant changes in legislation or statutory guidance;
- veterinary or professional advice;
- a significant animal-welfare or disease incident;
- the introduction of new species or significantly different husbandry arrangements;
- audit findings; or
- significant organisational change.

Lessons arising from incidents, near misses, veterinary advice and staff experience will be used to improve practice.