

Accreditation of farm animal facilities: common issues and solutions

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The Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC) is a worldwide organization that serves as a voluntary accrediting organization promoting the humane and responsible care of animals used in research, teaching and testing.

Accredited programs are well managed, their processes are well documented, and they are committed to utilizing the best practices in the industry. The AAALAC accreditation process is based on three relevant guiding documents and other reference resources. The relative importance of these documents depends on the country of the accredited program and the species used. For agricultural animal programs, the key underlying principles are that these programs utilize performance standards and that they operate in a manner similar to a high quality, well managed farm.

The accreditation process for agricultural animal programs is the same as for any other program. The institution initiates the process by completing a Program Description. This document reflects a self-assessment of the program and describes all aspects of the animal care and use program (the institutional oversight of the program, the veterinary care program, the occupational health and safety program, the husbandry processes for each species, and a detailed description of all facilities and locations where animals are housed or utilized). Once this document is submitted to AAALAC, a team is sent to evaluate the program and generate a report that is reviewed by a group of experts called the AAALAC Council on Accreditation, making the evaluation a truly peer-review process.

The majority of AAALAC accredited programs have no major deficiencies identified during site visits. The typical issues identified during AAALAC site visits of agricultural programs do not differ in any significant degree from programs using traditional laboratory animals. Institutional policies such as IACUC or ethics committee issues and occupational health and safety program issues make up the largest category of deficiencies. Deficiencies in the veterinary care program, animal husbandry program and physical plant are also often identified. I will briefly explain how to address these deficiencies.