

California moves to nip tail docking

SACRAMENTO

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- **UPDATED at 5:18 p.m. with comment from dairy industry**
- **Senate committee OKs prohibition**
- **Said to be common in dairy industry**

It would be illegal in California to routinely snip off the tails of dairy cows under a bill getting the approval Tuesday of the California Senate Committee on Food and Agriculture.

The bill is sponsored by the committee's chairman, state Senate Majority Leader Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

It expands existing state law banning the "docking" of horse tails. Exceptions would be made if the tail shortening were needed for the animal's welfare if the treatment or operation is performed by a veterinarian for veterinary purposes.

SB 135 passed with a 4-0 vote and moves now to the Senate Public Safety Committee, which will take up the bill before the May 1 deadline for fiscal bills.

"Californians' broad concern for farm animal welfare inspired the formation of the new Committee on Food and Agriculture, so it's especially fitting that one of the first bills we passed will stop needless animal cruelty inflicted on animals raised for food," says Mr. Florez.

“There’s just no reason to mutilate dairy cattle for this purpose, and we are pleased that the industry is recognizing tail docking as an archaic practice,” says Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States.

But Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen in Modesto, says the number of dairies docking cow tails is only 2 percent to 3 percent of the state’s total farms.

“I’ve been on 200 or more farms in the state and I’ve seen the practice on only on farm” Mr. Marsh says.

There are approximately 1.8 million cows raised for milk on 2,200 farms in California, the nation’s top dairy-producing state. A recent University of California survey indicates that 10 percent to 15 percent of California cows are raised in operations where tail docking is practiced.

SB 135’s passage would make California the first state to ban tail docking for cattle.