

aaalac ag update

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- Why should agricultural animal research programs participate in the AAALAC accreditation program?
- Dispelling the myths about AAALAC and accreditation
- The standards AAALAC uses to evaluate agricultural research programs



Half of all Land Grant Institutions in the United States currently participate in the AAALAC International accreditation program. Among those that are accredited, fifty percent also accredit their agricultural programs.

Dispelling the myths about AAALAC and accreditation

Some of the biggest barriers agricultural institutions may face in seeking accreditation are the myths and misperceptions that exist among some investigators and administrators. AAALAC's Agricultural Research Program Accreditation Advisory Committee (ARPAAC) has identified some myths and misperceptions which are corrected here ...

MYTH:

AAALAC is just another regulatory agency

FACT: AAALAC is **not** a regulatory agency. AAALAC offers a voluntary, peer-review accreditation program that is confidential. AAALAC does not perform inspections, but instead performs collegial evaluations of animal care and use programs. AAALAC's goal is to work with institutions to help them achieve the highest standards possible for quality animal care and good science.

MYTH:

AAALAC is too burdensome

FACT: The monetary cost to apply for accreditation is relatively low. Often the greatest expense is the time it takes to prepare the initial accreditation application which includes a "Program Description"—a comprehensive document detailing all aspects of the animal care and use program. After the initial application package is complete, it generally takes much less time to prepare for subsequent AAALAC site visits.

MYTH:

We could never afford to get our facilities up to AAALAC standards

FACT: What AAALAC looks for is that the housing and care of farm animals meet the standards that prevail on a high-quality, well-managed farm. AAALAC does not expect agricultural animal facilities to mimic biomedical laboratories.

MYTH:

AAALAC will impose biomedical standards on our agricultural animal research program

FACT: AAALAC does not hold agricultural facilities to the same set of criteria used to evaluate biomedical research laboratories. As stated above, AAALAC expects agricultural animal research programs to meet the standards for housing and care that prevail on a

high-quality, well-managed farm. (See back page for specific details on AAALAC's standards for accrediting agricultural programs.)

MYTH:

AAALAC is part of the IACUC

FACT: The "alphabet soup" of acronyms associated with animal research can be confusing, but it's important to know that AAALAC is not linked to the IACUC (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee) in any way. AAALAC does, however, evaluate the performance of the IACUC when it reviews an institution's animal care and use program.

MYTH:

We will lose control of our research

FACT: Sometimes faculty mistakenly believe that participating in the AAALAC accreditation process will result in more—and in their opinion, unnecessary—external control being imposed on their research. In fact, it is the institution's IACUC that is charged with overseeing research protocols and practices. As part of the accreditation review, AAALAC will ensure that the IACUC is performing well, and from time to time the AAALAC site visit team may question aspects regarding a protocol and may seek clarification from the IACUC regarding those points. But AAALAC itself does not impose additional controls on research projects.

MYTH:

If we aren't granted accreditation immediately it will reflect badly on our program

FACT: Some fear that as a result of participating in the accreditation program, the facilities will be declared inadequate and this will have negative repercussions for the research and teaching programs. AAALAC considers the information received from the institution and gathered during the on-site assessment to be confidential. In addition, AAALAC also holds the accreditation status of the institution confidential. If a program does not meet accreditation standards, the deficiencies found are explained in a letter and the institution is given a period of time in which to implement the necessary changes. After the changes are completed, reviewed and approved by the Council, accreditation may be granted.

“AAALAC accreditation gives us a visible, recognizable external validation that we are going the extra step to ensure the welfare of our animals and the integrity of our research.”

Debbie Jeannine Cherney, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Animal Science, Cornell University

Why should agricultural animal research programs participate in the AAALAC accreditation program?

Here's what colleagues at agricultural institutions have told us about the benefits of AAALAC International accreditation ...

Accreditation promotes—and validates—high standards for research and animal care

Colleagues at accredited institutions say that AAALAC accreditation “puts agricultural programs on par with biomedical research programs in terms of having a well-managed, well-documented and accountable animal care and use program.” They say that earning accreditation represents a high standard for quality, and that it “takes procedures, processes and facilities to the highest level, enhancing the quality of research.”

Accreditation provides public accountability

Members say that accreditation “demonstrates concern for animal welfare,” and “assures the public of the highest possible level of animal care oversight.”

Accreditation offers an opportunity for in-depth program assessment

One of the biggest benefits members noted was the “excellent opportunity for self and peer-evaluation to improve our program.” They also noted that this exercise in self-assessment provides a “valuable benchmarking tool, and quality assurance through peer-review.”

Accreditation stimulates continuous improvement

When an institution chooses to participate in the AAALAC accreditation program, it's committing to a process that stimulates continuous improvement. Earning and maintaining accreditation keeps an institution aware of, and engaged in, current best practices in the field of agricultural animal research and care.

Accreditation can identify the need for—and facilitate the acquisition of—additional resources

Participating in AAALAC accreditation may also help improve funding for research programs and facilities. Members say it offers an “objective source of leverage for continued improvements to our animal care program and facilities,” including garnering “administrative buy-in.”

Accreditation provides a positive image among research funders

Accreditation “gives added credibility to the animal research and teaching program among federal agencies—especially the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense, as well as large corporate sponsors,” say members. *(This is likely to become increasingly important as agricultural research continues to move to genetic and molecular levels.)*

Accreditation instills a sense of pride and teamwork among animal care personnel

Earning and maintaining AAALAC International accreditation is a great achievement that can instill a sense of tremendous pride throughout all levels of an organization. In particular, it can be an immensely satisfying accomplishment for the animal care technicians, custodians, and others who provide much of the day-to-day care for agricultural animals. The process of earning and maintaining accreditation is often a valuable team-building experience for the entire animal care and use staff.



“ As someone who is active in livestock research both for production and biomedical studies, I feel that AAALAC accreditation is visible evidence of a well run institutional animal care and use program with an emphasis on optimal animal care.

As a researcher and an IACUC Chair at a major Land Grant Institution, I have been very impressed with the thoughtful, informative and professional manner in which of AAALAC International site visitors interact with all personnel involved in an institutional animal care and uses program, regardless of how varied. When the site visit is done, almost without exception, they receive very positive feedback about their impact on improving the overall program.”

—Stephen P. Ford, M.S., Ph.D.
Professor and Rochelle Endowed Chair
University of Wyoming



What standards does AAALAC use to evaluate agricultural research programs?

AAALAC recently proposed the adoption of **three primary standards** to evaluate animal care and use programs: the 8th Edition of the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide)*, NRC 2011; the *Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching (Ag Guide)*, FASS 2010; and the European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes, Council of Europe (ETS 123).

AAALAC’s Council on Accreditation has used all three documents for several years and their pending adoption by AAALAC’s Board of Trustees as primary standards will solidify the importance of these performance based guidelines in the accreditation process.

AAALAC recognizes that the biomedical or agricultural research, testing or teaching objectives, as well as the health and welfare of the animals, will dictate when application of the recommendations of the *Ag Guide*, *NRC Guide*, or ETS 123 is most appropriate. Together,

the responsible oversight body (i.e., the IACUC or Ethics Committee), the principal investigator, and the veterinarian should use their collective professional judgement to determine which standard applies best with regard to the care and welfare of agricultural animals. (These decisions should be documented by the institution.) This performance-based approach can be used within the context of the requirements of the study and the species used.*

Regardless of species, research objectives or funding source, the public expects institutions to do all they can to make sure that research animals are appropriately cared for and that pain and distress are minimized. Working together with both biomedical and agricultural researchers, AAALAC strives to accomplish these objectives.

* The AAALAC International Board of Trustees is in the process of approving a new formal “Position Statement” on selecting the appropriate standard for the care and use of agricultural animals. Upon approval, we will share this and other new and revised Position Statements with the research community. They will also be available online at: www.aaalac.org/accreditation/positionstatements.cfm.

