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AAALAC also recently adopted a new Position Statement on “Selecting the Appropriate Standard(s) for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals” (see box below).

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.

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Why should agricultural animal research programs participate in AAALAC 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 as well-regarded, well-documented and accountable animal care and use programs.” They say that earning accreditation represents a high standard for quality, and that it “takes procedures, practices and facilities to the highest level, enhancing the quality of research.”

Accreditation provides a positive image among research funders. AAALAC accreditation “gives added credibility to the animal research and teaching program among [funders,] particularly the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense, as well as large corporate sponsors.”

Accreditation offers an opportunity for in-depth assessment provides a “valuable benchmarking tool, and assurance of high standards.”

Accreditation represents a high standard for quality, and “demonstrates concern for animal welfare.”

Colleagues at accredited institutions say that AAALAC accreditation “demonstrates concern for animal welfare,” and “assures the public of the highest possible level of quality animal care and good science.”

Earning and maintaining AAALAC International 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 the institution, including garnering “administrative buy-in.”

Earning and maintaining AAALAC accreditation keeps an institution aware of, and engaged in, current best practices in the field of agricultural animal care and use.

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

At the California State University, Los Angeles, the process of earning accreditation “demonstrates that our institution is conscious of the health and well-being of our animals.”

Facilities at these institutions reflect the “high-quality, well-managed farm.”

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, with the help of an Agricultural Research Program Accreditation Advisory Committee (ARPAAC), has identified some of the most common myths and misperceptions and corrects them here.

**FACT:** AAALAC is not a regulatory agency.

**MYTH:** AAALAC is part of the IACUC.

**FACT:** The “alphabet soup” of acronyms associated with animal research can be confusing, but it is 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:** AAALAC accreditation means that our institution’s IACUC is performing well, and from time to time the AAALAC site 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 corrects them here...

**FACT:** We will lose control of our research.

**FACT:** Sometimes faculty mistakenly believe that participating in the AAALAC accreditation process will result in additional controls on research projects.

**FACT:** We cannot afford to get our facilities up to AAALAC standards.

**FACT:** While AAALAC looks for is that the housing and care of the animals meets the standards that prevent animal suffering.
Why should agricultural research programs participate in AAALAC accreditation?

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 accredited animal care and use program.” They say that earning accreditation represents a high standard for quality, and that it “takes procedures, practices and facilities to the highest level, enhancing the quality of research.”

Accreditation provides a public accountability. Reputations from accredited programs 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. Participating in AAALAC accreditation may also help improve funding for research programs and facilities. Many say it offers “an objective assessment 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 potential funders— especially the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense, as well as large corporate sponsors.”

Accreditation motivates 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, veterinarians, and others who provide much of the day-to-day care for agricultural species. The process of earning and maintaining accreditation is often a valuable teambuilding experience for the entire animal care and use staff.”

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, with the help of an Agricultural Research Program Accreditation Advisory Committee (ARPAAC), has identified some of the most common myths and misperceptions and corrects them here:

AAALAC is just another regulatory agency

FACT: AAALAC is not a regulatory agency. AAALAC offers a voluntary, peer-review accreditation program that is not intended to impose additional controls on research projects. Instead, AAALAC’s primary purpose is to validate and maintain the quality and integrity of the animal care and use program. AAALAC is the only peer-review program that is accredited by the Accreditation Board for Health Care. AAALAC’s goal is to work with institutions to help them achieve the highest standards possible for quality animal care and good science.

AAALAC accreditation was positive for my lab

FACT: AAALAC accreditation was positive for many of our clients. As stated above, AAALAC offers a voluntary, peer-review program that is designed to provide value to those institutions that wish to improve their animal care and use program, while at the same time ensuring the integrity of the research process. As a result, participants in the AAALAC accreditation process will generally experience much less time to prepare the initial accreditation application, which generally takes much less time to prepare for subsequent AAALAC site visits.)

AAALAC is part of the IACUC

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

We will lose control of our research

FACT: Sometimes faculty mistakenly believe that participating in the AAALAC accreditation process will lead to an 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 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.

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

FACT: The monetary cost to apply for accreditation is not high. Often the greatest expense in the accreditation process includes a “Program Description”—a comprehensive report on the animal care and use program. However, participants in the accreditation process have found that this investment is often one that creates consensus among animal care staff, improves communications and relationships, and builds a stronger foundation for future accomplishments. (After the initial application package is complete, it generally takes much less time to prepare for subsequent AAALAC site visits.)

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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 we will have negative repercussions for the research and teaching programs. AAALAC considers the information received from the institution and gathers during the 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 explored in a confidential manner 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 was positive for MSU. The process leading to accreditation enhanced the overall performance of animal units. I strongly encourage all Agricultural Universities to fully embrace AAALAC accreditation.

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

Accreditation provides public accountability.

Representatives from accredited programs 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 self- and peer-evaluation to improve research and laboratory quality.

One of the biggest benefits noted was the “excellent opportunity for the entire animal care and use staff. Maintaining accreditation is often a valuable team-building experience for the entire animal care and use staff.”

Accreditation stimulates continuous improvement.

When an institution chooses to participate in the AAALAC accreditation process, it is 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 care and research.

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. Many say it offers “an objective means of benchmarking for continued improvements to our animal care program and facilities,” including garnering “administrative buy-in.”

AAALAC accreditation provides a positive image among research funders.

Accreditation “gives added credibility to the animal research and teaching program among biomedical and other animal care stakeholders,” especially the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense, as well as large corporations.

Accreditation builds 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 genuine 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 teambuilding experience for the entire animal care and use staff.

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Myth: AAALAC is just another regulatory agency.

Fact: AAALAC is not a regulatory agency. AAALAC offers a voluntary, peer-evaluation accreditation program that is designed to provide valuable insights for institutions that perform biomedical research on the care and use of laboratory animals. AAALAC cannot impose additional controls on research protocols. As part of the accreditation review, AAALAC will ensure that the IACUC is performing well, and from time to time the AAALAC site visit may question aspects regarding 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 may question aspects regarding 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 may question aspects regarding 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 may question aspects regarding research protocols and practices.

Myth: Accreditations are granted only for a year and then renewed.

Fact: Accreditation is a multiyear process. The process leading to accreditation involves an initial on-site visit, with follow-up reviews that result in a renewal award.

Myth: AAALAC standards will correct fallacies or weaknesses in our research program.

Fact: AAALAC standards merely provide a checklist of considerations. To correct weaknesses, institutions must make the necessary changes. After the changes are completed and reviewed by the Council, accreditation may be granted.

Myth: AAALAC will impose biomedical standards on our agricultural research program.

Fact: AAALAC does not hold agricultural facilities to the same standards as biomedical research laboratories. As stated above, AAALAC expects all animal research programs to meet the same standards for housing and care that prevail on a high-quality, well-managed farm.

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 held to the standards of the IACUC, nor is it comparable in any way. AAALAC does, however, evaluate the performance of the IACUC when it reviews an institution’s animal care and use program.

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Myth: We can never afford to get our facilities up to AAALAC standards.

Fact: While the initial application package can be expensive, it typically takes only several months to prepare the initial accreditation application. After the changes are completed and reviewed by the Council, accreditation may be granted.

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Fact: Some fear that as a result of participating in the accreditation process, the program will be declared inadequate and it will lose the benefit of the positive image. As stated above, AAALAC offers a voluntary, peer-evaluation accreditation program. If the program does not meet accreditation standards, the deficiencies identified are explored in a thorough review. The institution is given a period of time in which to implement the necessary changes. After the changes are completed and reviewed by the Council, accreditation may be granted.

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