What standards does AAALAC use to evaluate agricultural research programs?

AAALAC has adopted the use of Three Primary Standards to evaluate agricultural animal care and use programs: the Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching (Ag Guide), FASS 2010; the 8th Edition of the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (ILAR Guide), NRC 2011; and the European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes, Council of Europe (ETS 123). The adoption of these standards by AAALAC’s Board of Trustees solidifies the importance of these performance-based guidelines in the accreditation process.

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.

“Agricultural 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 Jeanine Cherney, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Animal Science, Cornell University

Questions about AAALAC’s accreditation program?

Contact us anytime:

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accred@aaalac.org
www.aaalac.org

Half of all Land Grant Institutions in the United States participate in the AAALAC International accreditation program. Among those that are accredited, fifty percent also accredit their agricultural programs. About 50% of AAALAC-accredited programs have agricultural animal research programs.
Why should agricultural animal 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 “sets agricultural programs on par with biomedical research institutions 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 maintaining accreditation “demonstrates concern for animal welfare,” as agricultural research continues to move to genetic and sponsored research.

Accreditation offers an opportunity for in-depth and “assures the public of the highest possible level of quality animal care and use programs.” They say that earning accreditation “puts agricultural programs on par with federal research funders.”

Accreditation provides a positive image among research funders. Accreditation “gives added credibility to the animal research and teaching program serving federal agencies—especially the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense, as well as large corporate sponsors.” This is likely to become increasingly important as agricultural research continues to move to genetic and molecular biology.

Accreditation instills a sense of pride and teamwork among animal care personnel. Earning and maintaining AAALAC International accreditation is a high achievement that can show a sense of tremendous pride throughout all levels of an organization. In particular, it can be an excellent means of recognizing contributions of animal caretakers, 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.

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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 Advisory Committee (ARAPAC), has identified some of the most common myths and misperceptions and corrects them 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 conditioned on an institution’s commitment to uphold AAALAC standards for research and animal care. But instead performs collegial evaluations of animal care and use programs by objective, peer reviewers, and its 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 the animal care and use program. This time is spent planning and implementing a program that—when it becomes accredited—will create consensus among animal care staff, satisfy research sponsors and researchers, and builds a stronger team. (After the initial application package is complete, it typically takes much less time to prepare for subsequent accreditation 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 animals meet the standards that prevail on a high-quality, well-managed farm. AAALAC does not require agricultural animal facilities to mimic biomedical laboratories. AAALAC will impose biomedical standards on our agricultural animal research program

FACT: AAALAC does not hold agricultural facilities to the same standards 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.

MYTH: AAALAC accreditation is a part of another regulatory agency

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 members mistakenly believe that participating in the AAALAC accreditation process will result in more—and in their opinion, unnecessary—oversight or external control being imposed on their research. In fact, we do not think of AAALAC as an external control agency overseeing research protocols and practices. As part of the accreditation process, AAALAC will ensure that the IACUC is performing well, and from time to time the AAALAC review team may question researchers implementing 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 process, their program 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 voluntary and confidential. If a program does not meet accreditation standards, the deficiencies found are explored 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 provides a recognizable validation that we are committed to upholding the highest standards for humane and ethical animal care and use.

— Kristine M. Bunnell, Ph.D.
Research Project Manager and IACUC Chairperson
AAALAC, Inc.

AAALAC accreditation was positive for MSU. The process leading to accreditation enhanced the overall performance of animal care and encouraged all Land Grant Universities to fully embrace AAALAC accreditation.

— John E. Duff, D.V.M.
President, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
The California State University System—Chair, Animal Care and Use Committee
Michigan State University