

National Vision for a Farm Animal Welfare Assurance System

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Vision

For Canada to have a comprehensive farm animal welfare assurance system that reflects Canadian values, involves science-informed national standards, and includes a suite of compliance activities sufficient to ensure domestic and international confidence in the welfare of farmed animals in Canada.

Benefits

- A high standard of animal welfare for farm animals in Canada, and correlated benefits in animal health and productivity
- The ability to provide assurance of farm animal welfare standards to international and domestic customers
- Enhanced well-being of animal producers including job-satisfaction and public trust

Necessary Components

1. Leadership and coordination

- National leadership and coordination of all levels of industry (breeder, producer, processor, sales, consumer) together with government (federal, provincial, territorial), the veterinary community, the humane movement, science, and other relevant professions.
- Development of future leaders trained in animal welfare science, policy and practice.

2. Standards

- A suite of timely national standards, informed by science and by relevant international standards, developed through a recognized process with wide input.
- Recognition and use of national standards throughout the country.

3. Compliance

- A suite of compliance-promoting activities such as quality-assurance programs, hot lines, and enforcement delivered by appropriately trained people.

4. Research

- Well targeted multi-disciplinary animal welfare research as a basis for science-informed standards and practices.
- Means of tracking public values as input into the system.

5. Education/extension

- Sharing of information and best practices across industries and jurisdictions.

- Development of education/extension staff knowledgeable in animal welfare practices and policy.

Existing Measures

1. Leadership and coordination

- Major leadership is currently provided by the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) which involves most of the relevant production industries and other stakeholders such as government, the humane movement, the veterinary community, and (to some extent) food processors, distributors and consumers.
- Leadership development is being achieved by education in animal welfare as part of some agricultural, veterinary and post-graduate training, in addition to workplace training in some producer organizations, government departments, and other agencies.
- Some sharing of best practices among government departments is achieved by the Federal-Provincial Animal Welfare group which allows relevant federal and provincial officials to communicate by teleconference.

2. Standards

- National standards include national codes prepared by NFACC's consultative, science-informed process, and federal regulations concerning slaughter and transport.
- Recognition of national standards is being achieved by the use of national standards in national quality-assurance and related industry programs, and by the referencing of national codes and regulations in relevant statutes of some provinces.

3. Compliance

- Animal welfare assurance programs are being developed and implemented by some industry organizations.
- Enforcement is being done by various local, provincial and national organizations, but with different approaches and levels of enforcement across the country.

4. Research

- Animal welfare research is being conducted on some species at universities and government agencies.
- A small amount of research is being done to track public values related to animal welfare.

5. Education/extension

- Some sharing of information and best practices is being achieved by conferences and training events organized by NFACC, industry organizations, and other bodies, and by communication among government specialists through the Federal-Provincial Animal Welfare Group.

Areas Requiring Strengthening and Development

1. Leadership and coordination

- NFACC was formed through a multi-year process of consultation, needs-identification and gradual engagement of stakeholders; however, it functions with only temporary funding. Industry organizations and government should ensure that NFACC has secure funding to provide

continuing leadership in the area, as well as to ensure that the codes are reviewed and revised regularly.

- Only a few animal welfare leadership positions in the country are currently filled with staff having specific training in animal welfare.
- Because many animal welfare problems have a genetic component, animal breeders need to be brought more fully into the national animal welfare assurance system.
- A process is needed to identify gaps in the present system, to take collective action and to evaluate progress.

2. Standards

- In order for Canada to have, and be seen to have, high standards for farm animal welfare, the provinces and territories need either (i) to cite national codes in their provincial statutes, or (ii) to create provincial requirements that meet those of the national codes.
- Similarly, by citing federal regulations for animal slaughter and transport in provincial regulations, provincially inspected plants could be put on the same regulatory footing as federally inspected plants, and provincial officials could participate in enforcing animal transportation.

3. Compliance

- All industries need to work toward quality-assurance programs or other means of self-regulation that include national standards for animal welfare.
- Some harmonization of enforcement is needed to ensure that lax enforcement in some jurisdictions does not reflect badly on the entire system.
- Coordination is also needed for other compliance-promoting activities (quality-assurance programs, provincial hot-lines, industry self-regulation, inspection) so as to create a satisfactory national system.

4. Research

- Animal welfare research capability needs further development for some sectors and issues. In particular, research related to slaughter and transportation is limited; research for minor species is extremely limited; and there is insufficient high-quality social research to track public values as input into standards.

5. Education/extension

- Provincial and local education/extension efforts need to be communicated to other jurisdictions through a sharing of best practices.
- National resources, coordinated by NFACC or educational institutions, need to be made available to local education/extension workers.
- More communication is needed between producers and breeders to tackle the role of genetics in animal welfare problems.
- As a national farmed animal welfare assurance system evolves, means of communicating the system to the public will need to be developed.

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