



Enhancing Canada's Agricultural Well-Being Through a One Welfare Approach

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NFAHW 
COUNCIL

This document was prepared by the National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council. The Council was formed in 2010 to advise governments and all other stakeholders in animal agriculture on matters of the health and welfare of farmed animals in Canada. The Council is funded jointly by non-government organizations with an interest in animal agriculture and federal, provincial and territorial governments. Council members are designated by their constituency because of broad expertise in animal health and welfare, public health and an interest in approaching topics and developing advice in the context of One Health. The National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council would like thank the working group composed of Council members and advisors as well as the expert consultation group for their time and commitment to improving Canada's farmed animal health and welfare system.

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Enhancing Canada’s Agricultural Well-Being Through a One Welfare Approach

The purpose of this document is to propose recommendations for governments and industry in support of a national framework for agricultural mental health which includes the well-being of producers, animals, and all agricultural stakeholders. Stakeholders include medical and veterinary practitioners, agricultural professionals, agricultural service providers, allied groups, and animal health and welfare regulators.

The National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare (NFAHW) Council welcomes the initiative of Parliament to study the issue of mental distress among farmers, which can in turn have a direct impact on the welfare of their animals. This is consistent with the recommendation from the NFAHW Council advisory document paper titled “[A National Farm Animal Welfare System for Canada](#)”. This paper explored the need for appropriate and timely medical and social services in situations where there is serious breakdown of human/animal well-being. The NFAHW Council “[One Welfare Interim Report](#)” also identified a need for increased awareness, advocacy, and appropriate mental health resources for producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel within the agriculture industry.

As a concept, **One Welfare** is a framework that recognizes the many interconnections between human welfare, animal welfare and the integrity of the environment. It is a known fact that the health and welfare of farmed animals is closely linked to the well-being of agricultural producers and other animal care givers. As observed by animal welfare regulators, the managers of commodity animal welfare programs, and veterinarians, cases of animal neglect are often precipitated by the development of farmer mental health issues. Serious animal welfare incidents involving mental health issues require appropriate intervention not only to ensure the well-being of the affected animals, but to facilitate the recovery of the farmer, and provide support to family, staff, first responders and animal welfare regulators experiencing distress from the incident. Animal disease events requiring response and control activities (including depopulation) also have a significant impact on the well-being of producers, their staff, their families, veterinarians and responders. It is critical to ensure an effective mental health support system is in place for individuals experiencing distress working in the agriculture sector.

Working in the agricultural field is rewarding and challenging. Farming is a 24-hour a day, 7-day a week responsibility that requires a strong sense of commitment and dedication. A wide range of unique occupational stressors exist in the agricultural industry, and an effective mental health support system needs to recognize these unique and specialized stressors and engage professionals who have a strong understanding of farming realities.

In November 2018, the NFAHW Council hosted a consultation to develop recommendations for a national program to help the agriculture community cope with mental health issues, and to raise awareness of the benefits of involving medical and social services both proactively and in response to human and animal health and welfare situations. The NFAHW consultation explored the concept of a national program that would focus on prevention, build resilience, and respond not only to the impact of daily stressors on the farm, but also to critical incidents such as disease outbreaks and disaster. The consultation studied the current situation, identified current program gaps, and proposed desired outcomes and recommendations. Drawing on the input received from the consultation, the NFAHW Council has made the following recommendation which can be supported by stakeholders and governments to enhance the support network for farmer and first responder mental health in Canada.

Recommendation:

Establish a national network for agricultural mental health that is nationally funded and coordinated with consistent core services and nationally developed resources to support and enhance farmer mental health. This should be delivered at the provincial and territorial level and must be flexible in order to adapt to regional differences.

The NFAHW Council consultation process identified core elements that should be incorporated into a successful national network of mental health in agriculture.

- A national network should include a combination of direct and indirect services such as:
 - A fully accessible help line which includes telephone, chat, and text functions as well as other emerging technologies,
 - Peer-support programming,
 - Community-based support systems
 - On-farm support, such as access to respite care in order to addresses human recovery needs and animal care and welfare issues on the farm
 - Resilience and well-being training programs
- The funding of the network should be sustainable and diverse to ensure long term viability. Support from governments, industry groups, and the public is critical for its success.
- The network should be accessible through one point of contact nationally, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, bilingual, and delivered by professionals with knowledge of farming realities.

- The network programs should be evidence based and integrated directly with farmers' input. The program should evolve according to a gap analysis that is informed by scientific research, validated data, and national and international best practices.
- The network programs should consider current available services and structures and focus on improving national coordination, facilitating collaboration with health departments, and strengthening response policies.
- The network should be effective in providing mental health support in the face of general daily stressors, as well as in crisis intervention. Effective prevention, intervention and post-vention services should be available and provided by qualified individuals.
- Educational tools and training should be developed to raise awareness and lift the stigma of mental health and well-being issues and promote among producers the importance of work life balance. These educational tools should also enhance mental health literacy to support all agriculture stakeholders in recognizing signs of stress or distress and identifying where to access available resources. Mental health and well-being educational programs should engage with Ag in the Classroom, 4H, commodity groups, and veterinary and agriculture programs at universities and colleges to distribute these tools and provide training.