

Welfare Assessment: We Care and it Shows

Florian Possberg

President and CEO, Big Sky Farms Inc., 905 5th Ave, Humboldt, KS, S0K 2A0

Email: fpossberg@bigsky.sk.ca

■ Introduction

The business of raising animals for meat has been with us for centuries. However, how animals are raised, where they are raised and the linkage to the consumer has changed dramatically over the last decade. The reality of how we do business means we need different linkages with the consumer of today. Canada Pork Council has developed an Animal Care Assessment tool to add to our Canadian Quality Assurance program to address these changing needs.

■ History

Perishable foods like pork meat were produced close to where it was consumed. Wall Street in New York got its name for the wall, which kept the pigs out the business section. Toronto was called Hog Town because it was a major processor of pork.

The pork served today in New York or Toronto is more likely to come from a farm in Iowa or Quebec than locally. Increasing populations of urbanites are supplied by declining rural communities. Food that was once produced just out of town on grandpa's farm is more likely to come from half way around the globe. Our consumers are no longer connected to the farm.

■ Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)

Animal Humane Societies were formed to expose and prevent cruelty to animals. The work of these groups focused on pain and suffering of all animals. These included companion, entertainment, farm, research and wild

animals. People universally shun activities which result in un-necessary pain and suffering to defenseless animals. Many animal humane societies in Canada are represented by the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. Most of the organizations efforts are the operation of animal shelters, investigation of cruelty complaints and education on good animal care. Cruelty to animals is a criminal offence in Canada. An example of the extent SPCA's investigative work is the statistics from Ontario. In 2004, Ontario investigated 15,993 complaints. 1585 of these (less than 10%) were for farm animals. Of all complaints, 695 resulted in charges being laid.

■ **Evolution of Animal Welfare**

Within a generation, perceptions of animals have changed. The once largely rural community in first world economies became urbanized. The new generation lost connections with animals raised for food and work. Animals were only house pets and friends. The entertainment industry capitalized on Mickey Mouse and Bambi. Humans were often characterized as the villains.

■ **Traditional Use of Animals Challenged**

Using animals for companionship, research, entertainment or food became questioned. How could we use our friends for research or food? Vegetarians and animals rightists became part of the normal scene in a more liberal society. The right to experiment on monkeys for cancer research became an issue. People wondered if domesticated animals could not only feel pain but anguish if not provided with proper stimulus. The "rock now equals a bug, equals my son" theory was not discounted by all. In this environment, hog barns, zoo's, animal research, and even house pets, came to constitute slavery and abuse of animals.

■ **New Attitudes Needed A Forum**

Perhaps the most visible of the new breed of animal lobby groups is PETA. Created in 1980 by Ingrid Newkirk, PETA now has 850,000 members and supporters. According to its web site, PETA is dedicated to establishing and protecting the rights of all animals. PETA operates under the principle that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment. With a budget of US\$29M in 2004, PETA is very well funded. They claim to have placed information packages into every elementary school in America.

Celebrities from entertainment, modelling and sports industry are used by PETA to grab attention and give credibility. Campaigns like *"I'd rather go naked than wear furs"* use nude Pamela Anderson to grab attention. *'Live and let Live'*, *'Meet your Meat'* and *'Jesus was a Vegetarian'* promote vegetarianism. *'Your mummy kills animals'* anti meat pamphlet and *'Your daddy kills animals'* anti-fishing campaigns are propaganda targeting children.

PETA funding is growing. PETA knows that the more attention they grab, the greater funds pour into their bank account. PETA may be the most successful animal rights group, but there are many more. Some like ALF (Animal Rights Front) are implicated in terrorist activities.

■ Traditional Americana is under Attack

- The Shrine Circus is cruelty to animals.
- McDonald's murders for Big Mac's.
- Ladies wearing furs can be assaulted.
- KFC cuts up live chickens.
- Christianity condones animal abuse.
- PETA etc. have embarrassed and harassed the family, church, business and state.
- Slick, self serving promotion hoisted on gullible youth leave us open to attacks that were unthinkable generations past.

■ What do we do?

We as an industry must accept that the rules of the game have changed. If anyone continues to have the attitude that we the farmer are owners and masters of our kingdom, including all living creatures, they better check with our consumers, and the general public. The days of ruling king's, no matter how benevolent, are past.

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Most people in today's society will accept that farmers are good stewards of their animals. Masters answer only to themselves, whereas stewards must answer to a higher power. The higher power that exists today is the general public, our consumer.

■ What does the general public want?

A large majority of people want to have pets, take their children to the zoo, and enjoy a delicious meal complete with meat.

They want to be assured that their puppies did not come from an ugly “puppy mill”. They want the animals in the zoo to live in quarters that simulate their natural environment. They also want to know that the meat animal was raised, cared for and slaughtered humanely.

They want to know that the practices of people benefiting from animal production are consistent with good animal welfare.

■ Who determines the definition of good animal welfare?

The Canada Pork Council (CPC) represents Canadian hog producers. CPC has gathered hog producers, animal care scientists and regulators to define good husbandry practices.

Areas addressed included stockmanship, housing, nutrition, environment, equipment and animal care. These elements were put together in a comprehensive animal care document. Once drafted, representatives of consumers, humane societies, food retailers and veterinarians went through the proposal for comment and several changes were made. Controversial issues like the use of gestations stalls and farrowing crates were discussed at length. Public perception is that movement restriction is harmful to sows. However, what are the welfare realities for the animals? Discussion on the positive and negative aspects of these practices lead to the conclusion that further research is required.

Once the issues were debated, the swine Animal Care Assessment program was agreed upon.

■ What is the Animal Care Assessment tool?

The Animal Care Assessment is a check list of the aspects that impact the day-to-day welfare of pigs. Standards described in the assessment are based on various codes including the Canada’s Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals.

By completing the questions from a check list, a producer will create a welfare assessment of his/her farm. Pigs are raised under various systems both

outdoor and indoor. In Canada, due to climate, a vast majority of hogs are raised indoors. Within any system, animal welfare is largely determined by the amount and quality of care provided.

■ **How is the program delivered to the farm?**

The Animal Care Assessment program becomes part of our CQA program. CQA includes documentation backed by an auditing program. Being attached to CQA, the application will minimize the time required for effective application.

■ **How will it benefit my business?**

The CQA program is designed to guarantee our consumers that the pork we produce is not only nutritious but also very safe. Many slaughtering plants now require that all their suppliers of hogs be in good standing with the CQA program.

We can now assure our consumers, whether just down the road or half way around the world, that our industry meets high standards of food safety AND animal welfare.

■ **Conclusion**

Producers, processors and retailers can now back up the claim that good stewardship is applied to the welfare of the animals used in the production of pork for the consumer.