

Working Together for Responsible Animal Care

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■ Introduction

When collecting my thoughts for this presentation, I asked several people to describe what it has taken to advance farm animal welfare in Alberta and Canada over the past 30 years. The words *'trust, foresight, transparent, non-confrontational, respect, industry-driven, pro-active'* were offered. Add to that *'working together'*. This approach has enabled the Canadian livestock industry to move farm animal welfare forward step-by-step.

Responsible animal care has many facets, including:

- Understanding what is animal welfare,
- Making sure we take care of basics needs,
- The laws and how they are enforced,
- Identifying what needs fixing and fixing it,
- Communicating with the public and consumer,
- Combining research and ethics,
- Making sure industry is at the table and providing input.

Working together means with your neighbor, community, fellow producers, other all livestock groups, regulators and those outside the industry. We have diversity within groups and often are challenged by the diversity within the livestock industry, let alone the challenges of working with those outside the industry. I will discuss the points above and give examples of how collective, cooperative actions advance animal care.

■ Understanding What is Animal Welfare

To acquire knowledge on animal welfare we must first understand what we and what others mean by “animal welfare’. Confusion exists because people often define animal welfare differently. *“People use different criteria in judging what constitutes a good life for animals and how animals ought to be treated,”* says Dr. Dan Weary of the University of British Columbia’s Animal Welfare Program (Fraser, et al. 1997). “Any conception of animal welfare involves values because it pertains to what is better or worse for animals.”

Dr. Weary and his colleague, Dr. Fraser, identify three overlapping views that are expressed relative to animal welfare:

- that animals should **function well**, in the sense of satisfactory health, growth and normal functioning of physiological and behavioral systems;
- that animals should **feel well** by being free from prolonged and intense fear, pain and other negative states, and by experiencing normal pleasures;
- that animals should **lead natural lives** through the development and use of their natural adaptations and capabilities.

Fraser noted that “the relative importance attached to each view is at least partly a matter of value judgments about what is more or less important for the quality of life of animals.” Cultural factors also influence how different societies weigh these views.

Appleby (1999) in his book *What Should We do about Animal Welfare* builds on Fraser and Weary’s work noting that while disagreement as to the relative importance of each concept exists, there is significant overlap. *“Perhaps we should focus on the areas of agreement and less on the areas of disagreement.”*

Working together to advance animal care means understanding how others view animal welfare. This holds particularly true when addressing sow housing, for example. **Figure 1** demonstrates how concepts may overlap.

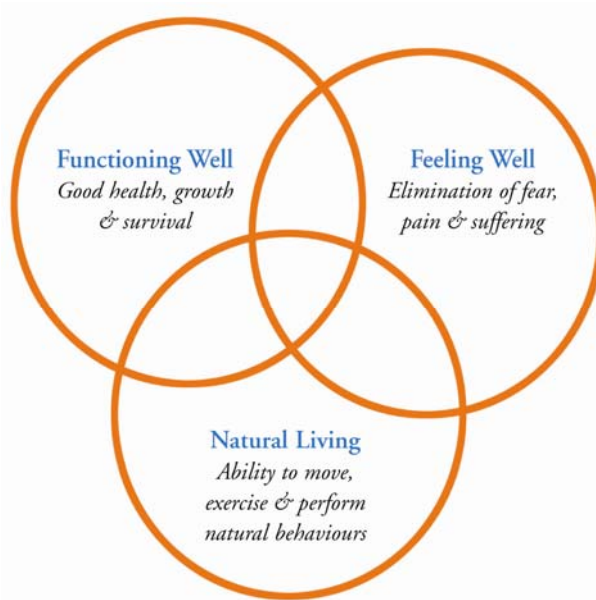


Figure 1. Three overlapping views of animal welfare. (adapted from Duncan & Fraser 1997)

■ Making Sure We Take Care of Basic Needs

Although it is an owner's responsibility to at least provide for the basic needs of their animals—food, water, shelter and veterinary care; it is also the law. But, there are those who are unable, unwilling, callous or even unaware that their actions cause their animals pain and suffering. In most provinces, we depend on others to report these incidents and hopefully there are those in place who can assist in alleviating the distress and help the animals. Thus, action is dependant on someone phoning and having a service and the resources available to respond, not just to single animal concerns, but, as we have experienced in Alberta, to large herds.

This takes working together and openly addressing how to best resolve problems, and how to respond before the issue is acute. We are fortunate that in Alberta the provincial government (Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development) for many years has deemed it a vital responsibility to ensure livestock protection services are properly funded and fund raising is not left up to a humane society. Rather, it is a public responsibility and public funds are used.

Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) has a producer-run animal care response line called ALERT. We learned that often a neighbor will hesitate to call the SPCA about a livestock care concern down the road, but will call our confidential line. We first try to lend a helping hand and we only participate based on consent of the owner. This is a team approach and only works if people are willing to work together. We do not hesitate to call the SPCA if we experience intransigence or obvious animal distress.

AFAC's on-call veterinarian reaches out on many occasions, nipping problems in the bud, providing knowledgeable counsel, often at the request of the SPCA officers. He is often the first to insist animals be seized and distress relieved by the SPCA officers. This is an excellent example of cooperation amongst diverse groups.

It has been my experience as manager of AFAC since 1993, that all too often we have plenty of funds to tell the public what a great job we are doing, but rarely do we stop and ask if we are making sure we are taking care of the basics.

■ The Laws and How They Are Enforced

Dr. Terry Whiting (2005), in his paper *Legislation for Animal Welfare Laws in Canada*, explored public policy development related to animal welfare. He stated:

In any society, the way animals are treated by people reflects a common morality. Responding to societal concerns is the business of government.

A new law results when society decides it is appropriate to surrender some aspect of individual choice and freedom for the benefit of the whole. Law is one of society's responses to communally held values.

There are regulations in three of Canada's federal laws that cover animal care and respond to Canada's commonly held moral position:

- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Humane Handling and Slaughter of Food Animals
- Humane Transportation of Animals

AFAC has prepared a detailed report entitled *Animal Welfare Laws in Canada*. Charges and conviction rates were included where information was available. This report is available at www.afac.ab.ca.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

A section within Canada's Criminal Code deals with animal neglect and abuse <http://www.afac.ab.ca/lawsregs/existingcc.htm>. It was first enacted in 1892 and has not been significantly altered since inception. It mainly deals with willful intent to cause pain, suffering, neglect or injury. It is primarily enforced across Canada by police officers. In jurisdictions where provincial acts exist and specialized enforcement personnel are responsible, the Criminal Code is rarely used.

There have been several attempts to improve this 1892 section of the Criminal Code with its antiquated definitions and fines. Positions pitted animal activists, animal welfare groups and eventually the public against animal users. Many, many dollars were spent by some livestock organizations to fight this. Would not working together on this and recognizing the need to take care of the basics have been a more productive course?

Alberta also uses the **Animal Protection Act**, which provides mechanisms to relieve animals in distress and to hold negligent owners accountable for their actions (<http://www.afac.ab.ca/lawsregs/apa.htm>). It was just recently revised. Public consultations were held. The livestock industry responded – mainly via AFAC. And, the industry was consulted throughout the entire process. We listened to what changes would assist the SPCA in doing their job. We added clauses like the use of monetary penalties (a Manitoba enforcement practice) and asked that regulations reference codes, again like the Manitoba act.

In Alberta, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development actually contracts and pays a provincial humane society, the Alberta SPCA, to enforce the Act in rural Alberta. Through what is called the Alberta Livestock Protection System, AFAC meets quarterly with Agriculture and Food staff, the Alberta SPCA, Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and the RCMP to work towards consistency of enforcement, a policy of voluntary compliance and to address ways to deal promptly with large herd seizures and border-line poor management situations. We collectively discuss ethical problems on handling low value, malnourished animals.

Dr. Whiting in his January 2005 paper, *It is Meet and Right So to Do. Considerations in the Humane Treatment of Low Value Livestock* said “animal welfare enforcement is an emotive workplace where personal conviction and public opinion come into play. Open discussion of animal welfare issues in livestock production systems can only help clarify and articulate the common morality of Canadians.”

Humane Handling and Slaughter of Food Animals

<http://www.afac.ab.ca/lawsregs/meatinspection.htm>

These regulations were implemented in 1960. CFIA inspectors and veterinarians are stationed at every federally registered slaughter establishment to monitor livestock handling and humane killing practices. Some provinces have companion legislation enforcing humane practices at smaller, local meat plants.

In Alberta, at the urging of AFAC, the Meat Inspection group is working with our provincial meat plants to improve the care and handling of livestock prior to and at death.

Humane Transportation of Animals

<http://www.afac.ab.ca/lawsregs/healthofanimals.htm>.

Again a product of the 1960's, this regulation defines conditions for the humane transport of all animals in Canada by all modes of transport. It prohibits overcrowding, loading and hauling animals unfit to travel and has specific feeding and watering requirements, maximum travel times, minimum rest periods, bedding requirements and more. CFIA enforces the regulation through routine inspections, unannounced site inspections and in response to reports of non-compliance. Given its age, the significant change in methods of transport and in new science, some parts of this regulation are under review.

Change has not been an automatic process. The livestock industry is concerned about pandering to animal activists and changing to comply with stricter European Union regulations. The industry also questions the consistency of enforcement. But, through AFAC, the Alberta industry both jointly and through the individual livestock organizations and companies, have responded and our recommendations for **outcome-based regulation** and referencing the codes of practice is being heard by CFIA. We shared our inputs, and organizations in Alberta, Ontario and nationally, have spurred on research into beef cattle, pig and poultry transport under Canadian conditions.

By working together we have had input, are connected and help drive change. Luckily, as a result, what we do not have in Canada – are the top down directives of the EU controlling production methods. The Canadian way in advancing farm animal welfare more closely reflects the US. However, unlike the US, we have not been exposed to local state ordinances decreeing prescriptive production practice restrictions.

Recommended Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals

<http://www.nfacc.ca/code.aspx>

Called the *Codes* they stand, today, as foundation documents. They were first conceived in the late 1970s by a group of extension researchers, veterinarians, livestock industry leaders and humane society representatives working together.

The Codes are voluntary guidelines that cover recommended housing and management practices and are intended to encourage farmers, handlers, transporters and processors to adopt reasonable standards of husbandry. Individual Codes exist for all commercially raised types of livestock. Some Codes have not been revised since the late 1980s. The poultry Code was significantly updated in 2002. All Codes received public funds to assist with over-seeing a consistent process and with printing.

(<http://www.nfacc.ca/pdf/english/PoultryLayers2003.pdf>)

At best, the Codes are 'living' documents that are relatively easy to update (compared to regulations). Currently, they are forming the foundation for new on-farm animal welfare verification programs; they are referenced in some provincial animal care acts and used by the courts as examples of 'generally accepted practices' in animal neglect cases. At their least, they are considered by some as minimum standards. In addition, the Codes are only voluntary, and sometimes are poorly distributed and communicated to the grassroots.

Some of our national livestock groups have on-farm food safety programs in place and have recognized the value of integrating critical animal care control measures to these programs. The Codes form the back bone of these assessments. These programs are new. They are currently being tested, tweaked, and adjusted by the egg layer, pig and chicken industries.

Five years ago a report, funded by AFAC, our Saskatchewan counterpart and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, recommended on-farm verification process as a means to prove to retailers and the public that humane practices were followed. It was soundly criticized. Today, three national livestock groups are moving forward following the formula outlined in the report. (<http://www.afac.ab.ca/reports/AWVReport.pdf>)

In his presentation at the January 2006 Banff Pork Seminar entitled *A Proactive Approach to Animal Welfare*, Dr. Bill Ballantyne, Director of Technical Service, Maple Leaf Pork said, "Most other countries have gone the regulatory route. Codes, with a practical audit component, appear to me to be

a much-preferred option. But, they do require some focused effort on the part of the industry.”

Resistance, of course, to the added expense of on-farm assessment is strong. But, examples continue to surface that point to positive economic results from improved handling, improved environmental conditions, and improved health of the animals.

Canada’s Code process is currently under review – not because it is broken – but because we can do it better. The Codes have been assessed by a team of researchers who compared them to current science and to standards set in other countries. They are examining new ways to articulate them (the shoulds, the musts).

Drs. Jeff Rushen and Anne Marie de Passille, who lead this team, believe flexible, animal-based standards that assess the state of the animals are needed rather than prescriptive conditions. In a paper for the OIE (World Organization for Animal Health), they have also called for a smoother integration of animal welfare and food safety standards (<http://www.afac.ab.ca/insights/Summer06/foodsafety.pdf>).

At AFAC’s 2006 Livestock Care Conference, they noted that attaining these goals will take some hard work initially, but have potential to pay off not only in terms of animal welfare benefits but also for the economic strength of the livestock industry. *“On the production end, there’s a danger in becoming fixated on the negative consequences of animal welfare – we think it’s going to cost us more, that there will be legislation and regulations.”* says Rushen. *“But many improvements to animal welfare can be cost effective. I think there are actually going to be a lot of benefits, including economic benefits.”* <http://www.afac.ab.ca/media/2006/06lccprogress.pdf>

■ Identifying What Needs Fixing and Fixing It

A positive attitude amongst producers towards farm animal welfare is an absolute essential to fix what is obviously not working well for animal care. Here are some examples.

In late 2002, well before BSE hit, our industries stood together and declared it was inhumane to load and transport a downed animal. We defined a downer as one that cannot rise or if standing, move without assistance. Collectively, Alberta’s beef, pork, dairy, bison, sheep and elk organizations lobbied our minister to fix the old transport regulation. It was changed as a result. We then set about to benchmark downers with a three year study.

In part because of our relationship with the enforcement arm of the Alberta SPCA, we are able to identify 'what needs fixing'. For example, the problem of unfit or compromised pigs going to auction markets and meat plants needed to be fixed. However, the salvage mentality was strong, despite the fact that to a growing number of producers, it was considered unacceptable to market animals in poor or weakened conditions.

Alberta Pork and AFAC set to work, first by defining and drawing a line in the sand regarding what was acceptable. It was clear the pork industry realized they needed to make these decisions – not have them dictated by those outside the industry. Veterinarians, inspectors and the enforcement officers were consulted. The results are *Humane Handling of Swine* <http://www.afac.ab.ca/careinfo/guidelines.htm>. This action prompted the dairy, beef and sheep industries to follow suit. These booklets are in demand by truckers, inspectors, feedlot owners and veterinary clinics. Due to demand, all have had to be reprinted. This is leading to many improvements and to more animals being humanely euthanized on-farm rather than being transported.

A significant example of industry working together both from a funding and content perspective is the new Canadian **Certified Livestock Transporter (CLT) training program**. (<http://livestocktransport.ca/>) It took over two years to gather the funds, gather the industry advisory and regulatory input and launch the program.

This program plus the Livestock Emergency Response Course <http://www.afac.ab.ca/courses/lerc.htm> and Livestock Handling for Youth <http://www.afac.ab.ca/youth.htm>, offered by livestock handling consultant, Jennifer Woods, were initiated in Alberta with joint government and industry funding and are now offered across Canada, thanks to **Putting Animal Welfare on the Agenda**, which I describe in the next topic.

Our success, measured by the improvement and promotion of responsible animal care, is based on openness with each other and the willingness to tackle some tough issues. And, it is due to the closed door policy regarding who is at the table. Our boards do not include animal activists as members and limit our interaction with them. This way our time and attention stays focused on our target market – the animal and those who handle and care for animals.

■ **Communicating with The Public and Consumer or Marketplace Signals**

Communicating to the public doesn't immediately advance animal welfare but it does aid in improved understanding. It needs to be mentioned as there are

many examples of how working together has benefited the industry. For example:

- The new **Putting Animal Welfare on the Agenda** Program, which is coordinated by the Ontario Farm Animal Council and involving all four farm animal care groups (<http://livestockwelfare.com/pawota.htm>). It builds on existing programming and has offered our groups joint funding for expanded public messaging and, more importantly, extension and technology transfer opportunities.
- **What's on Your Plate** is a livestock industry awareness project sponsored by the Alberta Livestock Industry Development Fund and its signators. Animal care messaging is integrated throughout many of the producer features (<http://www.afac.ab.ca/current/consumer/woyp.htm>).
- **Fairs and exhibitions** in all provinces provide a joint messaging venue to reach the public.

Despite all this, some now say there is a growing divide between livestock producers and the largely urban consumer who buys animal products.

Earl Dotson, at the 2007 Banff Pork Seminar and at AFAC's Livestock Care Conference, noted "there is a tremendous cultural confusion on the role and function of animals in society: are they pets, meat or part of the family?"

Charlie Arnot, CMA Consulting, believes that values matter (Arnot 2006). Speaking at a recent Animal Agriculture Alliance conference in the U.S. he suggested, "We are not connecting with consumers when we use scientific answers to ethical questions. We need to express our moral commitment, explain how we care, and then back it up with science." It's also about building trust. Arnot says, "Trust is important to people. They will refuse to do business with companies they do not trust. What are we doing to build confidence, competence and bring influential others to our position, which will build trust?"

■ **Combining Research and Ethics**

Responsible animal care is all about continuous improvement. We are continually learning more and more about animal behavior, and new ways to improve the quality of life of the animals in our care. AFAC is fortunate to have a source of funding from the Alberta Reinvestment Fund <http://www.afac.ab.ca/research.htm> to support research. Our research support is focused in five areas:

- husbandry practices – transportation, handling, lameness, euthanasia,

- livestock health – early detection of sick animals, reduced antibiotic use,
- painful procedures – dehorning, castration,
- housing – environment, space, mobility, enrichment,
- non-invasive stress measurement.

Our first priority is to respond to the needs of specific industry problems like on-farm spent hen euthanasia, sow stall retrofits, furnished cages, cold weather transport and bison dehorning. We also encourage production related research to add components to evaluate stress.

Dr. Temple Grandin told me when I first started with AFAC, “*use your researchers; you’ve got some of the best in North America.*” We’ve followed her advice and maintained a strong link with several across Canada. As an example, we are signatories to the Alberta/Canada Livestock Welfare Partnership. And, AFAC provides minor support and participates on Dr. Fraser’s UBC Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. The research funding consortium regularly consults with AFAC regarding research proposals. Researchers tell us they appreciate the link AFAC provides to industry. “We are working together for responsible animal care.”

Dr. Ray Stricklin, University of Maryland, recently stated (<http://www.afac.ab.ca/lcc/2007/07stricklin.htm>)

Science and ethics always overlap. Science deals with what is, while ethics deals with what ought to be. Research can tell us how much space an animal needs to engage in a behaviour, but research does not determine if an animal ought to be able to perform the behaviour. Science cannot make the decision as to where we draw the line on what ought to be.

Recognizing the interplay between science and ethics is vital for understanding the challenges of addressing farm animal welfare issues. Science alone should not be the basis for dealing with animal welfare. We need a moral justification for what we are doing in animal agriculture.

■ **Making Sure Industry is at The Table and Providing Input**

At a 2002 Canadian Farm Animal Welfare and Codes of Practice Consultation Workshop, Dr. David Fraser Professor Animal Welfare Program at the University of British Columbia, in reference to the federal government’s limited power with respect to farm animal issues, said, “*the important players are*

farmers, truckers, processors, veterinarians and farm workers who have the direct care of the animals.” He, in his capacity as an international advisor, often points to the industry-driven groups in Canada.

Several years ago, four separate provincial livestock industry groups were formed to work collectively on farm animal care issues. The first to form, the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) started over 17 years ago. AFAC started in 1993. Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan (FACS) and Manitoba Farm Animal Council (MFAC), were set up just prior to that.

Our board members come mainly from the major provincial livestock organizations. These diverse groups make active, progressive decisions together, generate ideas and build on the successes and examples set by others.

The benefits gained by having all livestock groups working together on farm animal welfare were articulated in a 2003 Strategic Review completed by AFAC. Member groups pointed to:

- information sharing amongst groups;
- understanding of each others' industries (narrowing of the farm-to-farm gap);
- coordinating efforts and responses on issues that impact the entire sector (we speak with one voice);
- joint urban (consumer) messaging;
- keeping the industry in front of issues;
- securing funds for extension, research, training and pooling resources for projects;
- liaising with government, politicians and local humane societies;
- peer pressure for continuous improvement in farm animal care.

All of AFAC's operational costs are covered by industry membership or cost-recovery. But the organization is entrusted with several other pools of government funds for research, extension, training, benchmarking, communication, issue of reports and livestock care response. Both government staff and politicians recognize the value of having an industry group lead and handle issues and problems.

AFAC wouldn't be doing its job if it wasn't nudging, suggesting, and repeating some key messages over and over. One of our vehicles to accomplish this is **Livestock Welfare INSIGHTS** <http://www.afac.ab.ca/insights.htm>, researched and written in most part by Jackie Wepruk. It is now to be distributed by other provinces thanks to **Putting Animal Welfare on the Agenda**.

The industry is tackling farm animal welfare. The Alberta beef industry has just hired an animal health/animal welfare specialist. The chicken farmers sponsored a conference on broiler welfare research. Cattlemen's magazine printed a letter about a rancher using lidocaine for dehorning. The Auction Markets Association asked to be a permanent AFAC board member. Our veterinarian was asked to speak at a feedlot school on handling unfit cattle. A poultry euthanasia project received research funds. The egg industry is looking at furnished cage options. The dairy industry is addressing lameness. The pork industry has its animal care assessment tools and a new group to tackle alternative sow housing. And, Canada has formed the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). <http://nfacc.ca/>

Officially launched in August 2005, our new national council is building capacity and brings together Canada's national livestock organizations, the retailers and food service industry, meat processors, veterinarians, federal government and federation of humane societies ... in two official languages! There is certainly diversity at this table. And it's not without spirited dialogue.

The primary objectives of NFACC are to provide a means for communication and collaboration about common animal care issues of a national concern.

In one year, it has established: a Business and Funding Plan, a part-time coordinator, recommendations for a renewed Codes of Practice process, concepts to work with researchers and receive their expertise, and a biweekly update on national and international issues.

One of this group's immediate duties is to assist in the development of processes required to update the Codes of Practice and to coordinate discussions of Code verification processes. All the groups at the table have a stake in being clear about what the Codes include, in agreeing what an audit process should confirm, and in making the system or process credible to the Canadian consumer.

In the words of Dr. Ballantyne (2006) *"there needs to be a process by which concerns can be clarified, options evaluated, alternatives proposed and if accepted, incorporated into a Code. This system needs a clearer mechanism for doing the required research and recommending improvements to animal welfare. The alternative is regulation or loss of markets."*

NFACC will act as the coordinating group to create industry positions regarding trade developments. The OIE has started a process of defining animal welfare parameters as part of the WTO agreement. NFACC can act as a facilitator to ensure a reasoned and scientifically based voice is provided by the Canadian food animal industry to the Canadian representatives at such meetings.

Sustainable food animal production will require refocused research, leadership from the animal industries and facilitation by government. This describes the Canadian way – core laws consistently enforced, enhanced by industry-driven Codes of Practice standards, on-farm animal care assessment and a ‘fix what needs fixing’, ‘continually improve’ attitude. This is what it means to be **“Working Together for Responsible Animal Care”**.

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