



Farmed Animal Welfare Recommendations Report

JANUARY 2024

Executive Summary

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Peter Pokorny created the opportunity for our diverse group of seasoned representatives of farmers, the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA), veterinarians, the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) and meat processors to advise him on practical steps that the BC government can take to improve the welfare of farmed animals in BC.

We volunteered to participate as an Advisory Committee based on terms of reference we reviewed and approved. We met together more than 10 times between April and December of 2023 and recognized early on that we share a deep and abiding care for the welfare of farmed animals. Notwithstanding our differing experience and perspectives on the status of farmed animal welfare in BC, we found considerable common ground and consensus on the steps that can and should be taken to improve the welfare of farmed animals in this province.

We did not have the resources or time to undertake a detailed assessment of the current framework of federal and provincial laws, regulations and policies and the various institutions with responsibilities for animal welfare. Instead, we relied on our combined experience and knowledge of how this framework operates on a day-to-day basis and where there is obvious

room for improvement. We received advice from our scientific advisors and several other experts on animal welfare as well as from leaders in various sectors, such as livestock transportation. We looked at the various frameworks in place in other Canadian provinces as well as those in other jurisdictions such as several Australian states. All of this information contributed to our consensus.

First and foremost, we recognized the need to create a new function within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food with a dedicated team of appropriately resourced and trained constables responsible for enforcement of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* (PCA Act) with respect to farmed animals, particularly those that are not part of established and audited inspection programs. As a province, we have relied on donations to support the enforcement work of the SPCA for far too long, an approach that is outdated and in need of rectification. The provincial government needs to fully fund enforcement of the provincial PCA Act for farmed animals.

Significant improvements can be made in the transportation and processing sectors, and in integrating and prioritizing animal welfare in emergency planning. Also, recognizing that the welfare of animals and that of farmers are inextricably linked and both depend on a healthy environment, we need to adopt a One Welfare approach in this province. Finally, there is a severe

shortage of livestock veterinarians. We must find ways to increase the number of veterinarians as they are integral to ensuring the welfare of all farmed animals.

We recognize that there are many ways to achieve the objectives and outcomes that are integral to our recommendations and have identified options and considerations in several areas. Our recommendation to create the new enforcement and inspection function in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, with the trained staff to deliver, is the exception to this approach.

This is a very important step that we are convinced the provincial government needs to take.

While our mandate is for animals farmed for food, feedback from the equine sector indicated they would like the recommendations to apply to them which the Advisory Committee supports. Our recommendations are set out below. The Advisory Committee understands that the BC government's consideration and implementation of these recommendations needs to be done in a manner consistent with the provincial government's *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA).

Recommendations

1

ENFORCEMENT, INSPECTIONS, AUDITS, OVERSIGHT – PUBLIC TRUST

Rationale

Public trust is essential for animal agriculture to be sustainable in BC.

British Columbia has no financial involvement in the enforcement of its own *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* by the SPCA and is the only province in Canada to rely solely on donations to support enforcement. Currently, the SPCA is primarily responsible for enforcing the PCA Act in British Columbia. It is not appropriate, effective, or desirable for the enforcement of provincial laws and regulations to be dependent on donations and associated fund-raising campaigns. The majority of the SPCA's enforcement activities are associated with companion animals, and there is an absence of capacity for proactive inspection of farms with livestock or poultry. This is particularly problematic for farms that are not part of established and audited inspection programs because these farms are not inspected at all. Some of them may have become livestock or poultry farms without having in place the experience and training needed to ensure the welfare of the animals they own.

Standardized government-led public reporting on the PCA Act is not available and is a key component of public trust.

Many jurisdictions in Canada and around

the world combine SPCA-like organizations with dedicated government agencies to ensure the welfare of companion animals and farmed animals with the SPCA-like organizations focusing primarily on companion animals and the government agencies focusing on farmed animals.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food should work in collaboration with the BC SPCA and commodity groups to increase the capacity to ensure compliance

with the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* and associated farmed animal welfare standards by:

- Creating a new inspection and enforcement function within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to assume responsibility for implementation of the PCA Act with respect to farmed animals. The financial resources necessary to create this capacity should be additional to the ministry's base budget so that the new function does not undermine existing programs. The new function needs to prioritize:
 - responding to complaints of distress regarding farmed animals. The new function should be responsible for responding to animal welfare complaints, including the conduct of investigations, any seizure, and recommendation of charges under the PCA Act or *Criminal Code of Canada*.
 - inspections pursuant to section 15.1 based on risk that animal welfare standards aren't being adhered to.

- inspections pursuant to section 15.1 of farms that are not part of third-party audited animal welfare inspection programs as well as of provincially regulated abattoirs, auction houses and relevant fairgrounds.
- Redefining the scope of responsibility for the SPCA for implementation of the PCA Act to companion animals, wildlife in captivity and exotics; and supporting the new function where agreed upon and appropriate in the implementation of the PCA Act with respect to farmed animals.
- Ensuring the provision of appropriate funding in cases where the BC SPCA assists the new function in responding to PCA Act complaints regarding farmed animals.
- Ensuring that auditors and inspectors are trained by a recognized and reputable organization and have access to species-specific expertise to provide audit and inspection services to all sectors as well as the new function.
- Ensuring that summary reports on the aggregated results of all audits and inspections are provided to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food where they need to be combined with the audit and inspection reports from the new inspection and enforcement function and the SPCA into an annual public report on animal welfare in BC. The content of the annual public report should include budget, number of constables/inspectors, number of complaints received, number of warrants and seizures, and recommendations for charges.
- Expanding the range of enforcement options and associated penalties available (to the BC SPCA and the new inspection and enforcement function within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food) to include fines and other mechanisms to incentivize compliance.
- Formalizing with recognized organizations the collaborative enforcement process that is currently practised by the SPCA to enforce the PCA Act to maximize compliance with the Act. Consider alternative dispute prevention and resolution approaches such as the New South Wales Stock Assessment Panel.
- Conducting a review of the current seizure appeal process, in which the Farm Industry Review Board is the tribunal, and considering

setting up a separate animal appeal tribunal that specializes in seizure dispute appeals in order to create a more efficient process.

- Requiring audits and inspection criteria to be guided by the Codes of Practice developed through NFACC.

2 UNAFFILIATED FARMS AND INDUSTRIES

Rationale

Lack of clear and up-to-date information about the existence and whereabouts of livestock and poultry farms, including unaffiliated farms, makes it difficult both to inform farmers about required standards of care and to monitor and ensure their adherence to those standards.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food should work collaboratively with other government agencies and relevant stakeholders to identify unaffiliated livestock and poultry farms and commence 15.1 inspections of them. Once identified, these unaffiliated farmers can be informed of the minimum standards of care and regulations to which they must adhere.

3 ANIMAL WELFARE AT THE TIME OF LOADING AND DURING TRANSPORT

Rationale

Transport poses some of the greatest risks to the welfare of farmed animals and the risk of eroding public trust. The challenges include, but aren't limited to, driver turnover (up to 100% a year); lack of driver understanding of minimum standards of care during transport; and lack of driver knowledge of what to do in the event of an accident such as trailer roll-over. Foreseeable risks are made more severe by unforeseen travel interruptions such as road blockages, missed ferries, and weather delays. Ferry transport imposes an additional set of risks where improvements can be made.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food should work collaboratively with relevant government agencies and BC Ferries to make improvements that would reflect animal welfare as a priority, with consideration being given to factors such as:

- Addressing the present lack of a minimum training requirement for those directly involved in transporting farmed animals by providing training that includes but is not limited to recognizing compromised animals and animals unfit for transport. The Canadian Livestock Training (CLT) program would qualify as a minimum requirement. Minimum training requirements are in place for transporting fish in the aquaculture industry.
- Providing government funding for training and development for those directly involved in transporting animals. Consider modifications to highway emergency management responses, such as requiring flaggers at highway blockages (resulting from mudslides, fires, etc.) to prioritize movement of animals being transported.
- Advocacy to ensure the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is adequately resourced to implement their legislation sufficiently and consistently.
- BC enforcement of federal legislation and development of an MOU between the new inspection and enforcement function and the CFIA to support efficient implementation of federal regulations.
- Euthanasia for animals that fail to meet the criteria of fitness for transport as outlined in the federal regulation.
- Training for on-farm euthanasia and disposal for producers and staff.
- On-farm euthanasia for end-of-lay/end of production hens where a ferry crossing would be required (regionally specific).

BC Ferries specific considerations include:

- Increasing reservation space and/or making discretionary allowances for livestock/poultry cargo.
- Creating a special reservation system to assure loading for livestock during extreme weather.
- Reservable routes for livestock/poultry cargo.

- Prohibiting the loading of trucks transporting animals onto ferry ramps (inclines) as per the Transportation Code of Practice.
- Allowances for drivers to remain on closed decks with their animals during voyage.
- Priority for livestock/poultry loading on the next sailing in case of missed reservations, regardless of the reason.
- Placement of animal cargo under shade and out of the elements where available.

4

PROCESSING

Rationale

Animal welfare is likely to be compromised if there is not consistency in the level and quality of care of animals during processing. Inconsistencies result from discrepancies between federal and provincial regulatory requirements, lack of adequate and ongoing training in humane handling practices, and ineffective prevention of illegal slaughtering.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food should improve animal welfare in processing by:

- Working collaboratively with the CFIA to ensure a consistent level of oversight with respect to humane transportation and humane handling at federal abattoirs in BC.
- Undertaking regular (e.g., annual) third-party audited inspections of provincial facilities to assess animal welfare practices and demonstrate competencies. This practice should include an assessment of the inspectors as well as of the abattoir staff and could be used to identify opportunities to improve animal welfare, as well as develop training tools.
- Providing training on animal welfare and humane handling practices to provincially licensed slaughter facility management and staff who handle animals at the time of hiring and at regular intervals to ensure their knowledge and skills remain current. Training records must be kept and annual competency reviews done. This needs to apply to abattoir licenses as well Farmgate and Farmgate Plus licenses.

- Ensuring abattoir license holders have explicit written standard operating procedures on animal welfare and humane handling for their facilities, including procedures on receiving compromised and unfit animals.
- Requiring all Farmgate and Farmgate Plus licence holders' animal handling practices to be reviewed in-person annually, at a minimum, by an approved government inspector.
- Reviewing the completeness and content of animal welfare training for provincial meat inspectors and updating as required and conducting annual animal welfare refresher training to ensure competencies in animal welfare.
- Updating the BC Meat Inspection Regulation (Part 4, Division 1, Section 13) to include specific information on the humane treatment of animals at provincial facilities rather than simply referencing the Safe Food for Canadians Regulation (Part 6, Division 7, Subdivision C). Clarify that these requirements apply not only to abattoir licence holders but also apply to Farmgate and Farmgate Plus licence holders.
- Coordinating staff who currently investigate illegal slaughter with the new inspection and enforcement function.

5 CLIMATE CHANGE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rationale

Farmed animals are at increasing risk from natural disasters such as fires and floods as the frequency of these events increases due to climate change. There is a need for increased coordination so farmers and emergency crews can respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of affected animals.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food should work collaboratively with industry Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs) that are working on these issues by:

- Working with other BC ministries to prioritize assessments of aging infrastructure in the province that would pose a risk to the welfare of farmed animals if they fail due to a natural disaster (e.g., an atmospheric river causing flooding and dike failure; heat domes, forest fires and fire suppression/management). Planning and preventative management to adapt to climate change will require infrastructure investment.
- Providing continued support for the inclusion of farmed animals in emergency management regulations and prioritizing animal welfare by developing a process that clearly defines the partners that are to be engaged and their respective roles. There should be an ongoing review and update of the partners, including the list of names, due to turnover to maintain efficiency and relevancy¹.
- Establishing a standardized process for farmers requiring re-entry to their farms in response to animal welfare concerns because of an evacuation order.
- Creating a program that ensures farmers and essential farm support services have access to evacuated areas in order to protect animals or to direct emergency personnel on animal requirements and locations.
- Elevating veterinary assistance to an essential service status during provincial emergencies.
- Ensuring access to water for both the watering and cooling of animals, and irrigation for feed production during times of drought.

6 SHORTAGE OF LIVESTOCK VETERINARIANS, ESPECIALLY IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

Rationale

There is a severe shortage of veterinarians that provide veterinary care to farmed animals in BC. We need to reverse the ongoing trend in the decreasing numbers of rural livestock veterinarians; improving access to veterinarians will better support animal welfare in the province.

¹ Emergency response could be a key component of the new function, and where there are major large-scale emergencies, coordination with the BC SPCA could occur where needed. Note: training in emergency response should be a component of ongoing training to both agencies.

Recommendation

The BC government should establish the long-term goal of increasing the number of livestock veterinarians. Considerations include:

- Increasing the number of subsidized seats available for British Columbians to study veterinary medicine, proportionate to the population in BC and the number of farm animals that require care. Where more seats meant for foreign students are open to Canadians, the cost should reflect resident and not foreign tuition rates.
- Allocating a specific number of funded veterinary student seats to students who come from a remote and/or rural background with an expressed interest in livestock practice.
- Engaging veterinarians with livestock and rural practice experience in the veterinary student selection process.
- Incentivizing veterinarian students to become livestock veterinarians by increasing government supports such as loan forgiveness, paid internship opportunities, and summer veterinary student funding for livestock and rural and remote practices (salary, living expenses).
- Initiating recruitment processes at the university entry level in rural and remote communities to encourage students to consider enrolling in veterinary medicine.
- Exploring opportunities for remote learning in the initial phases of entry level university for rural and remote students.
- Incentivizing livestock veterinarians trained in other countries to live and work as rural livestock vets in BC.
- Working with the federal government and the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) to prioritize and expedite immigration of veterinary professionals.
- Exploring opportunities to safely expand the role of Registered Veterinary Technologists in livestock, rural and remote practices in order to fully leverage the skill set.
- Working with colleges that offer Registered Veterinary Technologist training to ensure the training meets the needs of livestock, rural and

remote practice, to enable livestock rural and remote work experience, and to graduate a sufficient number of RVTs to meet the needs of British Columbia.

- Working with municipalities to both support a veterinary student from their community while attending veterinary school, and to offer incentives and a welcoming environment for a new veterinarian to move to their community.
- Having at least one veterinarian assist in investigations under the PCA Act.
- Subsidizing the travel of veterinarians prepared to develop/service a clientele that is far away.

7

HUMAN, ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERCONNECTION

Rationale

Known as ‘One Welfare,’ this concept calls for a coordinated program of action to improve human welfare in order to improve animal welfare (and vice versa) and to protect the environment as a prerequisite for both human and animal welfare.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food should work collaboratively with the Ministry of Health and other relevant agencies to invest in a One Welfare approach for mitigating/avoiding risks to farmed animal welfare and farmer well-being.

8

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Rationale

There is a lack of public awareness and understanding of the framework for farmed animal welfare because the framework is neither accessible nor transparent.

Public understanding of the framework for farmed animal welfare can only be effectively achieved if the range of federal and provincial laws and regulations that make up the framework are

clearly documented along with the responsible institutions. Notwithstanding public interest and concern for farmed animal welfare, the framework has not been documented to date. This is a barrier to transparency and accessibility can be easily overcome by documenting the framework and making it available to the public.

Recommendation

The BC government should adopt the attached description of the Farmed Animal Welfare Legislative Framework and incorporate into that description the responses to the recommendations set out above as appropriate.

9

IMPLEMENTATION

Rationale

Advisory Committee members note the importance of ensuring the intent of the recommendations is maintained in implementation.

Recommendation

The Deputy Minister should reconvene the Advisory Committee within 12 months to update and review implementation progress.



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