

FARM PRACTICE

ANIMAL CARE AND HANDLING

Description

Farmers are responsible for ensuring that the basic physical needs of animals in their care are met. Primary requirements essential to survival include nutritious feed, clean water, climate-appropriate shelter or housing, and health care. In addition, farmers need to practice humane handling techniques to satisfy animals' needs for comfort. Animal care is among the many important responsibilities that B.C. livestock and poultry farmers assume in their daily role to provide a comfortable environment for their animals and to ensure safe and nutritious food products for the public.

The section entitled Glossary of Terms toward the end of this document provides generally-accepted definitions for animal care, animal rights and animal welfare.

Activities and Operations

There is a variety of ways in which the provision for farm animal care is met in British Columbia. The national Codes of Practice, commodity-specific animal welfare audit and verification programs, federal and provincial legislation, industry-led animal care initiatives, and marketing boards' orders and programs all contribute to farm animal care.

Codes of Practice

National Codes of Practice cover many aspects of husbandry and outline expectations for the care and handling of most species of farm animals. These codes were developed by consensus amongst diverse groups interested or involved in farm animal care, welfare, health, or research.

Included in the Codes are recommendations and requirements for housing, sanitation, nutrition, health care, handling, catching and loading, transportation, processing and other animal husbandry practices.

In all cases and for all species, the following needs are to be provided inasmuch as possible:

- shelter
- ready access to palatable and clean water
- a diet to maintain the animals in full health and vigor
- space requirements for an animal in the company of other animals, particularly of like kind
- the opportunity to exercise many normal patterns of behaviour
- light of appropriate duration, intensity and distribution
- flooring that neither harms the animals nor causes undue strain
- prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment, of injury, parasitic infestation, and disease

- contingency plans to address emergency events such as disease, fire, flood, or disruption of electrical and/or mechanical services or supplies
- daily care of farm animals
- humane handling
- humane euthanasia procedures

A new development process for the Codes of Practice was finalized in 2009 which improves the process of integrating current scientific and professional knowledge into the Codes. While some Codes have been more recently revised than others, there is currently significant commodity group interest in updating Codes in the near future. The National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) facilitates Code development or revision processes and recommends that Codes be reviewed every five years and revised as needed.

Animal Welfare Audit and Verification Programs

Animal welfare audit and verification programs for assessing farm animal welfare have already been designed and are in the process of being implemented by several commodity groups. Development of these programs stems from a commitment of farmers to animal care and the need to satisfy food retailer and consumer concerns that farm animals are raised humanely. Included in these programs are requirements for housing, feed quality control, and disease prevention. Monitoring, record keeping, and second-party auditing are all components of the verification programs. The Codes of Practice have been used as foundational documents in developing animal welfare audit and verification programs and there is industry commitment to continue doing so in the future.

Additional voluntary verification schemes that address animal welfare also exist and are available for those producers wishing to meet or operate under qualification standards or logos such as *BC SPCA Certified*.

Industry-Led Animal Care Initiatives

A number of industry-led initiatives aim to promote responsible farm animal care. The British Columbia Farm Animal Care Council (BCFACC), for example, promotes and provides:

- a BCFACC animal care hotline (Telephone: 604.287.3276; Web Address: www.bcfacc.ca)
- livestock emergency response training
- certified livestock transport training
- livestock behaviour and handling courses
- animal care educational resources for industry use
- national animal care standards

Orders and Programs of Marketing Boards and Associations

Provincial commodity boards manage a number of orders and operational programs that provide direct and indirect animal care benefits.

For B.C. poultry farmers, these include biosecurity standards under the mandatory B.C. Poultry Biosecurity Program, as well as on-farm food safety programs. On-farm food safety programs also address animal care through requirements for proper ventilation, lighting, animal handling, mortality record keeping, and cleaning and disinfection of brooding and grow-out facilities. The organization Chicken Farmers of Canada has a comprehensive animal care manual for producers, whereas other poultry organizations and boards are focusing on the development of improved animal welfare programs and standards for birds under marketing board jurisdiction. Egg Farmers of Canada (EFC) has

developed – among other programs – national animal care standards and a rigorous salmonella testing program known as *Start Clean Stay Clean* to contribute to hen health and product integrity.

The BC Pork Producers Association has implemented the *Production Protocol Enhancement Plan* which outlines management standards for animal care, biosecurity, food safety, and the environment.

Marketing boards associated with other commodities also have emergency response plans in place, developed in collaboration with provincial and federal government agencies and industry partners to ensure efficient communication and operation.

Non-Governmental Animal Care Organizations

The following non-governmental organizations all play a key role in facilitating farm animal care and welfare in British Columbia.

The *BC Farm Animal Care Council (BCFACC)* has a vision to ensure that consumers and the general public are knowledgeable and confident that the livestock products of B.C. have been produced under humane science-based farm animal care practices while contributing to the sustainability and the value of the industries.

The *BC Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA)* – under the authority of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* – has the mandate to investigate and take action regarding situations involving animal cruelty. The BC SPCA also has authority under the *Criminal Code of Canada* to recommend charges to Crown Counsel for the prosecution of individuals who inflict suffering on animals. The SPCA also works with industry and government to implement science-based improvements to farm animal welfare.

The *Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA)*, in its animal welfare advocacy role, has a responsibility to promote the humane treatment of animals. All practicing veterinarians in B.C. are members of the CVMA.

The *National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC)* provides a cross-country coordinated approach in the promotion of responsible farm animal care and in the facilitation and review process of Codes of Practice revision and development for all species.

Provincial livestock and poultry associations are involved in ongoing initiatives to promote and support farm animal care through a variety of avenues such as research funding, seminars, working groups and distribution of educational material.

Related Farm Practices

Other farm practices that pertain to animal care and handling include, but are not limited to, the following.

See also Farm Practices: [Transportation](#)
[Feeding and Watering](#)

Glossary of Terms

The term *animal care* refers to the care and handling provided to domesticated animals in meeting basic welfare requirements and in enhancing their quality of life through management and environmental factors.

The term *animal rights* refers to the belief that animals should have the legal right to humane treatment, especially as it applies to the right to not be exploited for human purposes such as food, research, and clothing. Animal rights beliefs are typically associated with the animal rights social movement as followed and promoted by many animal rights organizations.

The term *animal welfare* refers to the quality of an animal's life and its ability to cope with the conditions in which it lives. The concept embodied in the use of this terminology is much broader than the absence of pain and suffering. Animal welfare is an evaluative concept which is both science-based and values-based.

Legislation

The provision of farm animals' basic physical needs is required under federal and provincial legislation. Information on federal and provincial legislation can be found in Appendices B and C. Acts, regulations and bylaws that regulate or may affect animal care and handling include, but are not limited to, the following.

Federal Legislation

The *Health of Animals Act* protects human and animal health through the control or elimination of diseases and toxic substances, and allows the Minister to create regulations that govern humane treatment of animals. Under these provisions, conditions for the humane transportation of farm animals have been defined in Part XII of the *Health of Animals Regulations*.

The *Criminal Code of Canada* prohibits anyone from willfully causing animals to suffer from neglect, pain, or injury. Police officers as well as staff employed by The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals are charged with the responsibility and authority to investigate complaints of non-compliance.

Provincial Legislation

The *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA Act)* protects all animals (other than wild animals not in captivity) from distress during handling or any activities not considered to fall under generally-accepted animal management practices. The Act empowers the BC Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA) to intervene if animals are in distress. In this context, distress is defined as being:

- deprived of adequate food, water, shelter, ventilation, light, space, exercise, care or veterinary treatment
- kept in conditions that are unsanitary
- unprotected from excessive heat or cold
- injured, sick, in pain or suffering, or
- abused or neglected

For the most part, complaints concerning animal distress are not eligible for resolution through the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*. Complaints of animals in genuine distress should be forwarded to the BC SPCA.

The BC Farm Animal Care Council (BCFACC) is also prepared to receive concerns regarding farm animals. BCFACC will review specific concerns and direct a complainant to the most appropriate organization to address an issue promptly. This organization may be a relevant commodity group or the BC SPCA if there appears to be a legitimate concern of animals in distress as defined in and pursuant to the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*.

Publications

Publications that provide further information on animal care and handling include, but are not limited to, the codes of practice for the care and handling of farm animals as outlined below. Because codes are under review on an ongoing basis, the website for the National Farm Animal Care Council should be consulted for the most up-to-date versions.

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle (2013)

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle (2009)

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Equines (2013)

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Fox (2013)

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Mink (2013)

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs (2014)

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep (2013)

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Deer (Cervidae) (1996)

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Bison (2001)

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Chickens, Turkeys and Breeders from Hatchery to Processing Plant (2003 – Under Revision)

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Goats (2003)

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Transportation (2001)

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Veal Calves (1998)

Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pullets, Layers and Spent Fowl – Poultry-Layers (2003 – Under Revision)