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PAACO CERTIFIES NEW FEEDLOT AUDIT

A newly developed tool for auditing animal welfare in feedlots was given conditional approval and is the latest program to earn Certified Audit status from the Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization, Inc. (PAACO).

“From PAACO’s perspective, this is a great accomplishment and shows great foresight on the part of the Canadian cattle feeders,” said Jennifer Walker, DVM, PhD, newly-elected PAACO chair. “Many species associations, processors, private audit companies and humane organizations have utilized PAACO’s 3rd party, independent review process to ensure the quality and add credibility to their animal welfare audit instruments. This latest endeavor demonstrates PAACO’s commitment to working with all stakeholders while setting the standard in animal welfare audits.”

The Canadian Feedlot Animal Care Assessment Program developed by the Calgary, Alberta-based National Cattle Feeders Association (NCFA), is unique in that it is the first certified audit designed for the feedlot segment of the food production industry. It will cover the time period from when cattle are delivered to the feedlot through when they are loaded out to go to slaughter, thus harmonizes-well-with the PAACO-certified North American Meat Institute’s (NAMI) meat plant welfare audit. The program is also complementary to the Canadian Beef Code of Practice with specific best management practices for feedlots.

The non-proprietary instrument is the product of a coalition of feedlot operators, packers and customers (retail and food service), veterinarians, ethologists, animal scientists and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Major packers Cargill, Tyson and JBS were key cooperators in developing the audit.

Lily Edwards-Callaway, PhD, JBS Beef Cattle Welfare leader and NAMI Handling Committee chair, said, "I commend the Canadian feedlot industry for taking on this animal welfare initiative that will serve as a complement to the NAMI plant audit tool. Consumers increasingly rank animal welfare as an important factor in their buying decisions and this tool will provide confidence in an integral segment of beef production. This initiative presents an opportunity for our industry to increase transparency and share our animal welfare values with discerning customers and consumers."

“The feedlot industry has been proactive in working collectively with our processors and other stakeholders, such as our retailers, to develop this assessment tool,” said NCFA Chair Larry Schweitzer. “It was important to involve all players in the beef supply chain to create a credible audit instrument, which PAACO’s process brings to this tool. Our goal was to have a program

that satisfied our packer customers and their retail and foodservice customers without adding costs, duplication or a bureaucratic burden on feedlot operations.”

Schweitzer added that his organization’s ultimate goal is to not only “have one common national feedlot animal care assessment tool used by all players in the beef supply chain”, but to eventually also “harmonize the Canadian feedlot animal care assessment program with the USA for a North American feedlot animal care audit/assessment program” similar to the NAMI audit for processing plants that is widely adopted in U.S. and Canadian establishments.

Now that the audit has been certified, NCFA’s next step will be to educate Canadian feedlot operators on the expectations and criteria to which they will be held accountable. PAACO will also be exploring the opportunities for training of certified feedlot auditors with the intent of developing curriculum and offering an auditor certification course.

Certifying animal welfare audit instruments is only one of the services offered by PAACO, whose animal welfare auditor trainings and auditor certifications for meat plants and poultry have become industry standards. PAACO currently has certified nine audits and there are others in the review process.

Information on all PAACO-certified audits and programs, as well as the 16 core criteria for certified audits, may be found on the “Certification” page of the PAACO website, www.animalauditor.org.

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