

# Animal Care

## Background

Consumers are increasingly interested in how their food is grown and raised. In particular, consumers are interested in the practices used by livestock owners in raising animals for food. Alberta's cattle feeders take great pride in their business operations, and expend great effort to ensure the health and well-being of their animals. In today's highly urbanized society, the vast majority of Canadians are three to four generations removed from the farm. This separation can lead to a general lack of understanding about animal care and operational practices on Canada's farms. ACFA seeks to increase understanding and inform consumers about feedlot practices and cattle feeders' commitment to the care of their animals.

## Guiding Principle

Following industry standards of animal care to ensure their health and well-being is an essential pillar of the cattle feeding sector's social license to operate. Cattle feeders recognize their obligation to build and maintain the trust of their customers by offering beef produced through humane practices and recognized and respected standards of animal care. Cattle feeders are socially responsible, and respect and manage their animals to the highest standards of health and welfare.

## Position

ACFA and its members are committed to following recommended and recognized standards of care based on scientific knowledge about the needs of their animals. They also possess extensive training and experience in animal husbandry. ACFA believes that this basket of skills, coupled with sound professional judgment, is foundational to the many day-to-day animal care decisions that impact the well-being of individual animals and overall herd health. To ensure the highest level of animal care, ACFA members also draw on the knowledge, advice, and guidance of accredited veterinarians and animal nutritionists.

ACFA believes that all feedlot owners, operators, managers, and staff should be trained on the proper care of cattle, including humane handling practices, and all processes and procedures that touch on the health of feedlot cattle. Furthermore, every cattle feeding operation should express its commitment to animal care through a written animal care policy that is accepted by all feedlot staff. Animal care policies should be communicated to staff, cattle feeder clients, livestock transporters, and all those involved in providing services to the feedlot.

ACFA expresses its commitment to animal health and welfare by maintaining membership and actively participating or partnering with numerous organizations dedicated to promoting best practices in animal care. This includes *Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC)*, the *Alberta Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Steering Committee (AFAHWSC)*, the *National Farmed Animal Care Council (NFACC)*, the *Canadian Animal Health Institute (CAHI)*, the *Canadian Animal Health Coalition (CAHC)*, and the *Animal Nutrition Association of Canada (ANAC)*.

Alberta cattle feeders are committed to following all federal and provincial government regulations for the handling and care of livestock as established by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and other agencies. ACFA is also committed to taking the lead on initiatives designed to improve animal care. Examples of this commitment include the establishment of the Canadian Livestock Transport Certification Program (CLT), a new AFAC project designed to improve upon the care and handling of compromised cattle, and a significant financial investment in the development of a new Histophilosis vaccine. Adherence to the following animal care standards underscores ACFA's commitment to animal care:

### 1) *Beef Code of Practice*

The *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle* is a set of industry standards developed by the *National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC)*. The latest version of the code was published in 2013, and replaces the 1991 code published by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The code serves as our industry's understanding of the care requirements for beef cattle, and outlines sound management and welfare practices on all matters related to the husbandry of beef cattle. The Beef Code is the result of a rigorous development process that takes into account the best scientific research, compiled and vetted through a transparent and independent peer-reviewed process, and the input received from industry stakeholders including cow-calf producers, cattle feeders, veterinarians, research academics, and livestock transporters. While the code does not take the form of regulation, industry does expect that all producers will defer to the code. ACFA members contributed to the development of the code, and it is the expectation that feedlots will incorporate its practices to ensure the best standards of animal care possible.

## 2) Feedlot Assessment Tool

To help cattle feeders implement good animal care and handling practices and demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement, ACFA and NCFA have initiated development of the *Canadian Feedlot Animal Care Assessment Tool (FLAT)*. This is Canada's first national feedlot animal care assessment program, and is recognized as the standard Canadian feedlot protocol for animal care by cattle feeders, transporters, beef processors, and food retailers. The program is fully auditable and is recognized by the Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization (PAACO). The program draws on the Canadian Beef Code of Practice, the Animal Handling Guidelines and Audit Guide of the American Meat Institute, the Beef Quality Assurance Program of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), and the Canadian Certified Livestock Transportation (CLT) program. With the Feedlot Assessment Tool, cattle feeders can conduct self assessments (first party audits) and also prepare for second and third party audits.

## 3) Feedlot Emergency Preparedness Plan (FEPP)

To help cattle feeders ensure the health and well-being of cattle in the event of a disease outbreak or sector-wide emergency, ACFA spearheaded the creation of a *Feedlot Emergency Preparedness Plan (FEPP)*. This comprehensive plan links the province's feedlots to the province-wide emergency management system, and provides cattle feeders with the ability to be better prepared for emergencies. The plan is comprised of two components. The first component is a set of guidelines and tools to aid feedlots in preparing and managing an emergency. The second component is a plan for the association. ACFA will work with its members to complete individual emergency plans and keep them current.

### Actions

- ACFA and NCFA will complete the Feedlot Assessment Tool and the Feedlot Emergency Preparedness Plan initiatives, and then conduct extension activities to bring these programs into the feedlots.
- ACFA will continue to partner with animal care organizations to ensure cattle feeders are following the best practices in animal care.
- ACFA will keep members informed on the latest developments in animal health and well-being, and provide opportunity for members to be involved in the development of new practices when required.
- ACFA will continue to invest in research and development directed to improve the health of cattle.
- ACFA recommends regular review the FLAT program to keep it current as new information and research becomes available that will optimize on the care and handling of feedlot cattle.

### Key Messages

- *Cattle feeders are committed to providing safe, healthy, and high quality food in an economically, environmentally, and ethically sustainable and socially responsible manner. This includes following industry standards of animal care.*
- *Recognized standards of care should be based on scientific knowledge about the needs of animals. Training and experience in animal husbandry, sound professional judgment, and the guidance of accredited veterinarians and animal nutritionists are foundational to the day-to-day animal care decisions.*
- *The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle, the Feedlot Assessment Tool, and the Feedlot Emergency Preparedness Plan are a solid foundation on which ACFA demonstrates its commitment to animal care.*

Approved by the Board on: November 19, 2015

Subject to Review by: November 19, 2017