

Updating Canada's Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Goats: What We Heard and How We Addressed It

Introduction

In 2019 the Canadian National Goat Federation (CNGF) initiated an updated Code of Practice to the existing 2003 Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Goats. The Code's development was led by a committee of [13 professionals](#), including goat producers from across Canada, government representatives, animal welfare advocates, scientific researchers, processors, and veterinarians brought together to collaborate on this national standard.

From the outset, it was recognized that this Code development would entail a considerable undertaking. Not only would the new Code provide the CNGF with a near 20-year update [once completed], it would also develop revised requirements across four sub-sectors: dairy, meat, fibre, and hobby.

This report summarizes how feedback through the public comment period (PCP), along with a [top-of-mind survey](#) conducted at the outset of this Code's update, informed the final Code of Practice. The report can be read alongside the actual Code (available [here](#)).

Top-of-Mind Public Input

Prior to the first meeting of the Code Development Committee (CDC) an informal survey was conducted inviting Canadians with an interest in goat welfare to provide "top-of-mind" input on priority care and handling issues regarding goat well-being. Respondents predominantly self-identified as members of the general public, animal welfare advocates, or consumers.

The main welfare themes were:

- Housing
- Painful procedures
- Feed and water
- Transportation
- Health management

To a slightly lesser degree, respondents also cited lameness, handling, euthanasia and slaughter, infectious diseases, mastitis, parasite management, kid nutritional management, traceability, emergency management, and shearing.

All "top-of-mind" findings were shared with, and thoroughly discussed by, the members of the CDC at the first in-person CDC meeting. As a result, these topics were well recognized by all Code sub-committee Leads and served as a basis for identifying and fleshing-out new section contents.

Public Comment Feedback in Response to the Draft Code

Goat farming has changed a lot since 2003. As a result, the draft Code released for a 60 day public comment period covered many new topics and was one of the longest Codes to date. It was hoped, therefore, that public feedback received from official organizations and individual stakeholders would both help to identify areas where oversights may have been made and assist the CDC in narrowing and balancing its focus. This was certainly achieved.

The final version of the new Code is very much a by-product of considerable public input. In many cases, PCP comments resulted in major reworkings and even reframings of the Code's contents. In this way, our public contributors tangibly served as co-contributors to the final development of the Code.

Inviting public input on the Code when we did encouraged a strong willingness among CDC members to carefully and thoroughly consider all feedback received. In addition, basic comment analysis was done to identify themes and guide the CDC in revising the Code. One of the by-products of this careful review process was the relatively long period between the close of the PCP and the submission of the final Code to NFACC.

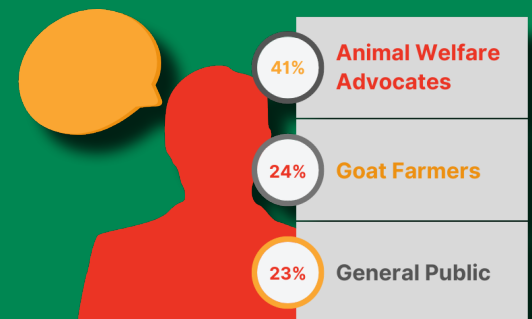
Public Comment Period by the Numbers

The public comment period ran from December 18, 2020 - February 22, 2021.

14 organizations and 321 individuals participated.

The Code Development Committee had 31 online meetings over several months to consider all the input and reach consensus on the Code of Practice.

Who We Heard From



TOP THREE RESPONDENT GROUPS

Where We Heard From



TOP THREE GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS

British Columbia 61%
Ontario 18%
Alberta 8%



Photo credit: Catherine Michaud

"I'm proud of the collaborative effort committee members have shown since we began our work in the spring of 2019. The public comment period enabled us to ensure that we were on the right track in providing goat producers with the information they need to meet the needs of their animals,"

**Peter Kerkvliet,
Chair of the goat Code
Development Committee
and dairy goat farmer
from Ontario**



Photo credit: Melissa Moggy

Public Comment Period Feedback

The following represents a general overview of how public feedback received was instrumental in informing the final version of the Code.

Section One: Roles and Responsibilities

Public input received regarding this short section resulted in the CDC revisiting that which had been an ongoing discussion preceding the PCP: How best to balance large scale multi-employee farms stipulations with requirements for much smaller (even hobby) scaled operations. As a result, the CDC opted to strike a balance which ensured that animal welfare would be maintained as a high priority on all farms, while allowing for some flexibility in terms of individual farm practices.

Section Two: Housing and Handling Facilities

Section Two received more comments than any other section. Feedback related to this section also prompted the CDC to revisit and reconsider/clarify issues related to temperature control and air quality – especially ammonia level control procedures. While the committee also reviewed subsections related to lighting, flooring, feedbunk design, and watering systems, considerable revisions were made to prepared tables that had attempted to reflect priorities associated with (i) pen design/space allowances and (ii) fencing. Code deliberations that ensued involved a great deal of discussion and further investigation of international standards for pen size allowances. In both cases, the committee revisited many additional sources to generate tables that would be as fully informed in both areas as possible (across a wide array of conditions). This, in turn, resulted in considerable revisions to original tables with the intent of making things as clear and well founded as possible. It also served to underscore the need for future research in this area.

In addition, the CDC revisited and further addressed themes involving adequate or appropriate shelters, suitable building materials, and goat isolation (in relation to social contact). Building material-related reviews gave rise to more precise wording than had originally appeared in the first draft. The CDC worked hard to strike a final balance between existing structures, multi-use material needs, and goat welfare. The theme of animal isolation was addressed by many public commentators in response to a number of sections of the draft Code. Public input here was instrumental in helping to ensure that the final Code was consistent regarding references made to animals being housed alone and under what circumstances.

Section Three: Emergency Preparedness and Management

The introduction of a section dedicated exclusively to emergency preparedness is a relatively new addition to NFACC Codes. As a result, public feedback was anxiously awaited regarding the draft content. In advance, this section had received a great deal of deliberation among CDC members concerning suitable scope and detail. As was the case with Code Section One [Roles and Responsibilities] public feedback and subsequent CDC deliberations focussed on efforts to balance farm size stipulations with responsible animal care (in terms of viable Requirements). Since threats from barn fires, power or mechanical failures, extreme weather, and natural disasters cannot always be avoided - even with the best preparedness practices in place - discussions mainly addressed balancing risks with suitable planning and necessary equipment.

As a result of the public input received, many draft provisions (which had originally appeared within the body of the section) were reallocated as appendices with the intent of playing more supporting roles (in order to support individual producers as they saw fit).

Section Four: Feed and Water

Section Four received an abundance of public feedback. The CDC was invited to reflect on many issues ranging from broad, basic nutritional needs to more specific nutritional issues associated with responsible feed and water management (i.e., food-related health and safety/quality through to the possible engagement of professional nutritionists and veterinarians). In addition, the CDC revisited many management-related practices regarding provisions for ensuring

Section Four: Feed and Water (continued)

nutritional-based health at different life stages (e.g., pregnancy, pre-kidding, and weaning). Owing to the considerable time spent by the CDC prior to the PCP addressing requisite management activities regarding colostrum, most feedback related to this critical topic had been thoroughly discussed and considered in advance. Most contributors were also satisfied with the draft version of the Code content related to water provisions.

Section Five: Husbandry Practices

Husbandry-related feedback generated a substantial amount of careful reflection by the CDC. Castration and especially disbudding sparked the greatest amount of commentary. As a result of concerns over the amount of research available with regard to approved drugs the CDC adjusted its original proposals regarding a suggested phase-in period. Topics related to dairy and fibre production concerning health-related issues were also carefully reviewed and minor revisions were introduced. In addition, many low-stress related practices involving proper handling (especially moving goats by horns or hair), suitable tethering practices, the use of livestock guardian dogs (to ensure predation control), acceptable breeding related practices (i.e., suitable maturity) and the use of identification techniques (minimally painful) were all carefully reviewed and subsequently amended.

Section Six: Health

The CDC spent the most time deliberating how best to consider, meet, and balance public feedback on this section. Chief among all of the feedback reviewed were questions and comments regarding mandatory veterinarian engagement (ranging from the need for formal Veterinary-Client-Patient-Relationships through to the prescribing of off-label medications and herd health management planning). Other topics such as lameness, observation requirements, and record keeping were adjusted to accommodate strong public preferences. No topic, however, received more deliberation following the public comment period than did the issue of infectious disease prevention and prospective management. In the end, the CDC tried to attain a balance between idealism and realism with regard to responsible efforts to prevent and manage chronic ailments within herds.

Section Seven: Pre-Transport Decision Making

Most reviewers were generally content with the draft version of this section. Requests for revisions included reducing repetitions and achieving more brevity where possible. Such requests were readily accommodated. Other themes included, once again, balancing reasonable responsibilities for larger vs smaller farms/operations. Many additional considerations were advanced regarding how best to meet specific needs of goats during pre and post-loading. The CDC was able to agree upon many proposed changes regarding this section while ensuring alignment with current humane transport regulations.

Section Eight: Euthanasia and On-Farm Slaughter

The CDC did not receive a large number of comments related to this section. The CDC recognized and respected the strong emotions associated with euthanasia and slaughter. Comments on this section largely reinforced or repeated considerations that had been deliberated at length by the CDC before the PCP. The CDC appreciated all of the thoughtful suggestions that endeavoured to help clarify or suggest alternative approaches to the originally proposed draft Code.

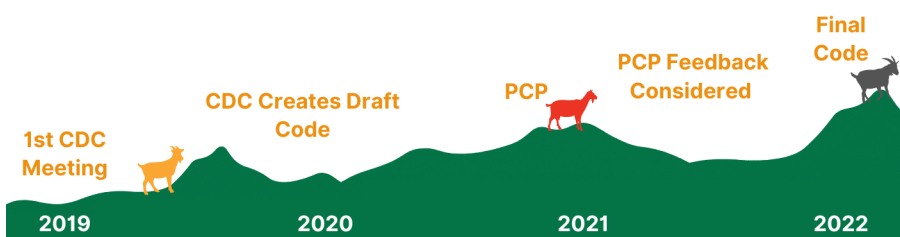


Photo credit: Robin Schill

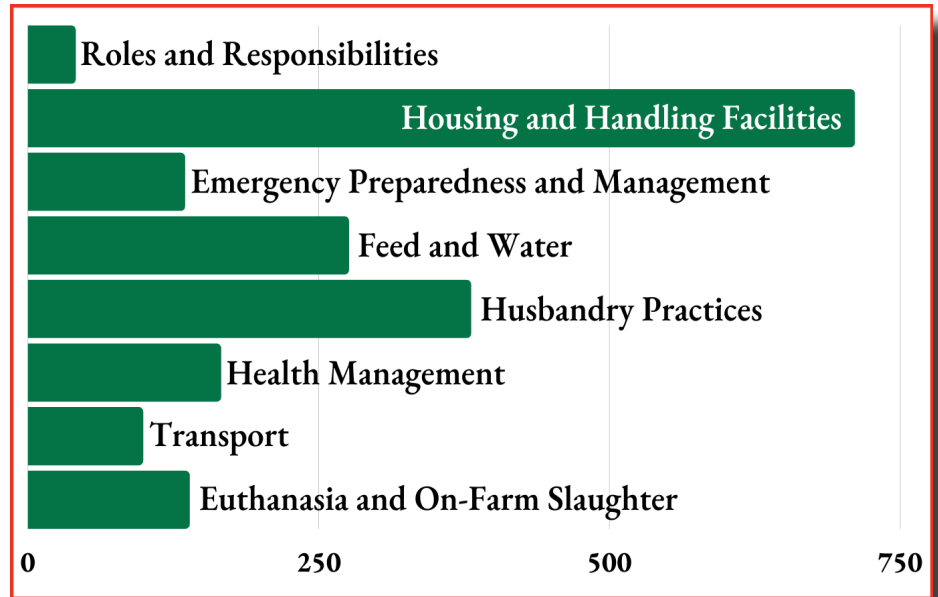
“Having an updated Code of Practice will benefit goats across Canada. Thank you to the public and producers for helping shape this Code, which reflects the industry’s progress on goat welfare.”

**Melissa Speirs,
Humane Canada
representative on the
goat Code Development
Committee**

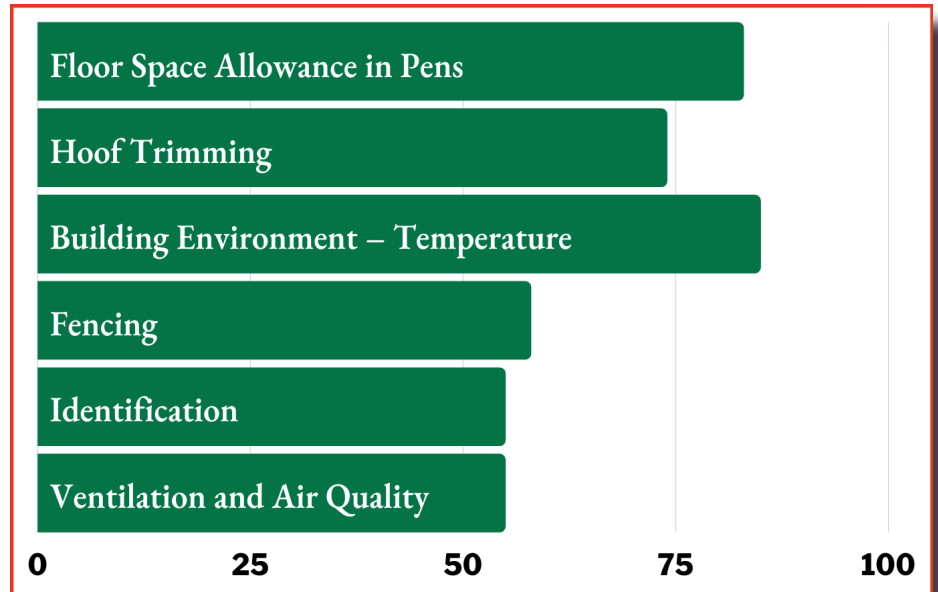


Photo credit: Theresa Bergeron

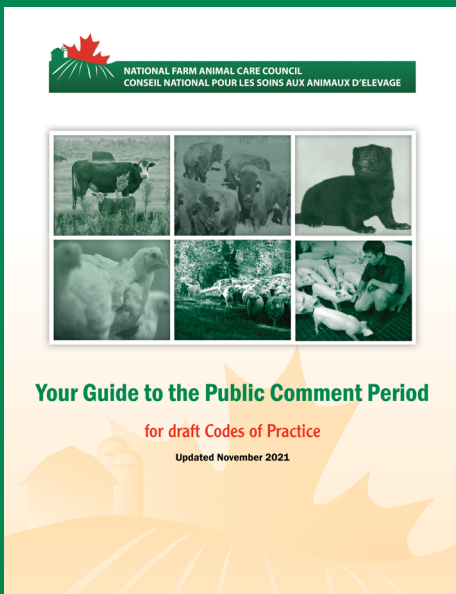
Summary of Average Number of Comments in Each Chapter of the Code



Chapter Subsections that Received the Most Comments



A common thread throughout all aspects of the Code Development Process, including the Public Comment Period, is the principle of continual improvement. Canada has set a unique path that is based on pursuing this goal through the multi-stakeholder, consensus-based approach that is led and coordinated through NFACC.



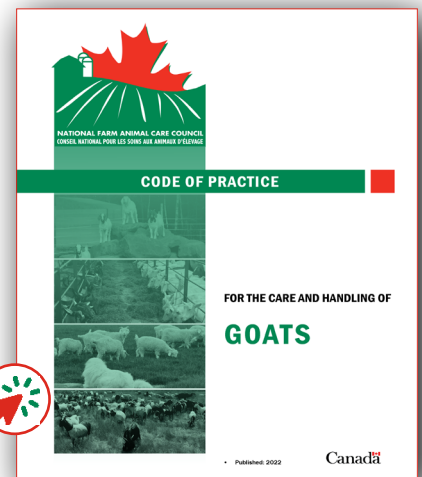
Your Guide to the Public Comment Period

Funded in part by the Government of Canada under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership's AgriAssurance Program, a federal, provincial, territorial initiative.

Thank you!

Thank you to all those who participated in the public comment period. Your feedback brought important improvements to the Code not only in the sections discussed above but throughout the entire Code of Practice. Research needs identified through this project are summarized [here](#).

In closing, it is also important to note that a large number of general public comments were explicitly laudatory regarding the obvious amount of time, effort, and thoughtfulness that the CDC had invested in preparing its lengthy draft. In turn, this appreciation served to encourage the CDC to ensure that all feedback and constructive comments received were thoroughly reviewed.



[CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE CODE](#)

